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#269 SEP/OCT  
2013



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## OPENING WOUNDS

The Kaiju issues have become a staple of the new FM. Throughout them all, August Ragone has helped to shepherd each one and give it shape, lending his expertise to each page. I thought it only fitting to let him tell you a bit about his journey through this unique area of Filmland.

Ed Blair  
Executive Editor

Growing up, I recall vivid monster obsession—even as far back as my pre-school years; I remember having dinosaurs, spaceships, and monster toys. I remember FAMOUS MONSTERS, Aurora kits, and all manner of creatures great and small on our cathode screens. And then there were Godzilla, Rodan, and Mothra...

For some reason, I gravitated towards these strange beasts, and they gained a prominent place in my world. I don't know why. It's a question that I don't think I can answer without analyzing it from an adult perspective, which would perhaps not be true, but rather an explanation well after the fact. But Japanese monsters ruled my young world.

I always knew that they were intrinsically different than Western monsters, which were always strangers in a strange land, while *kaiju* seemed to be a natural part of the landscape of the Japanese archipelago—like creatures from Greek myth, they were part of the land, sea, and air.

This was hammered home when I lived in Tokyo and began to have open discussions with fans and filmmakers alike, who agreed that this was the inherent element of the Japanese Monster. They were divine and connected to the creatures of folklore, stemming from the indigenous religion of Shinto, or Way of the Gods.

Since childhood, they have been my companions, but were never frightening to me (with minor exceptions). Why? It's because instead of invoking fear or dread, they inspired sheer awe. These weren't simply dinosaurs or atomic mutants, they were divine monsters, a breed unlike any other—and uniquely Japanese.

During the '70s, they flooded our television sets and movie theaters, and we loved every monstrous minute of them—and while those days are gone, the *kaiju* yet remain—fascinating new generations and creating awe in the children of today.

August Ragone  
Contributing Editor

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Kirk's monstrous alter ego, Kirk Von Hammett, from his book **TOO MUCH HORROR BUSINESS** ([kvhtoy.com](http://kvhtoy.com))



SHE WAS NOT  
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WHITE

# ZOMBIE

*Performing  
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For years now, the Monster Kid and Heavy Metal communities have been in awe of the custom guitars of Metallica axe-man Kirk Hammett. A lifelong lover of classic monster films, Kirk was able to blend his affinity for monster movies and his passion for music by creating custom, one-of-a-kind guitars featuring the monsters from FRANKENSTEIN, THE MUMMY, BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN, DRACULA, and more. All of these creations were in collaboration ESP, with one of the industry's foremost leaders in custom guitars. ESP has supplied instruments for both Kirk and James of Metallica, Ronnie Wood of the Rolling Stones, George Lynch, and the late Jeff Hanneman of Slayer.

When the time came to do a monster guitar for a production run—one that would be designed not just for Kirk, but for the fans and players out there as well—the real question was which film he would choose as his muse. The answer came quickly. Kirk explains, "Not only is WHITE ZOMBIE simply a great movie, it's also one of Bela Lugosi's creepiest roles. When one first glimpses Murder Legendre, one might wonder if this being is of earthly origin—or a spawn of the devil. Legendre is an evil witch doctor, voodoo character who runs a sugar cane mill in Haiti which he has 'staffed' with zombies! You have to remember, it was made in 1932, so it is way before flesh-eating zombies had been invented—which makes it a pioneer! It's also a really chilling, atmospheric movie; and the amazing thing is that it was not a major studio production!"

ESP President Matt Masciandaro shares Kirk's enthusiasm in

collaborating to bring one of these legendary instruments to the masses. He recounts, "It had to be at least 20 years ago when Kirk received his first horror graphic ESP. Occasionally I would ask him about doing a production model, and at first the answer was that he wanted his to be one of a kind. Eventually he said he was working on a hook, and wanted to wait until after it was published. Since that finally happened this year, we began discussing the first production model horror graphic. His decision was to start with the White Zombie, which will be released in a limited edition soon [Ed. Note: January 2014]. Based on our conversations, the White Zombie may be the first project of this kind—but probably won't be the last."

The guitar will be far more than a museum piece, as Kirk always designs his guitars with playability in mind. His MUMMY guitar is not only amongst the most famous in his arsenal, but he frequently marvels at how it continues to get better and better as it ages. That is the same mindset that was used to create the WHITE ZOMBIE guitar. He concludes, "The graphic used on my White Zombie guitar is from the Half Sheet movie poster and features Murder Legendre, a couple victims, and a zombie. What I try to do with these guitars is strike a balance between playability, sound, and appearance to create an instrument that is both eerie and elegant at the same time. With the White Zombie guitar I think I've achieved this, and I think it's perfect for vampires, werewolves, or just a ghoul's night out on the town..."



The ESP/Kirk Hammett WHITE ZOMBIE guitar will be available after the NAMM show in January of 2014. Visit [esp guitars.com](http://esp guitars.com) for info on availability and purchase.

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# Frank Frazetta

## Art and Remembrances

Frank Frazetta, Jr.



**F**rank Frazetta was arguably the greatest fantasy artist of his (or any) generation. His Conan and John Carter paintings launched him into rarefied company. His CREEPY and EERIE covers, along with original creations like *The Death Dealer*, cemented his legend. But while many know the works, few know the man. *Famous Monsters and Hermes Press* have teamed with Frank Frazetta Jr. to tell the definitive story of his father's life, as well as bring to light many family photos and original works of art that have never before been seen. The following text and photos are exclusive excerpts from **FRANK FRAZETTA: ART AND REMEMBRANCES**, available in regular and limited edition formats through [www.captainco.com](http://www.captainco.com), Diamond-supplied comic shops, Amazon.com, and major book chains.



**Frazetta's Tarzan and The Golden Lion Canaveral Press, 1962.**

The Conan paintings were all done through the evening hours, when the kids were sleeping and no one could interrupt the process once he got started. These were the paintings that he burned the candle at both ends to complete. After finishing most of them, he lay on the living room couch for several days trying to recover from the onslaught of mind control and imagination he pulled from within to create them. We always knew when there was a deadline to meet—from either the phone ringing all day with the publisher asking when he was going to bring it in, or the smell of turpentine or cobalt drier coming from the studio out back. That meant it needed to be dry during transport of the art to wherever it was headed. He never even got up to eat while I was around; mom went in with a sandwich or bowl of pasta while he continued painting. Coffee was also a

priority, with a pound of sugar in each cup.

This sugar craving was one of the things keeping him working through long nights and meeting some of his deadlines. Dad truly loved the taste of anything sweet. We would always say to him, "How much coffee with your sugar?", or, "How many pounds of gummy bears do you want us to buy, Pop?" He put so much sugar in his coffee that it couldn't completely dissolve. He would hold the sugar jar upside down over the coffee and shake it four or five times, leaving a bottom layer of sugary sludge once he reached the bottom of the mug.

He enjoyed hard jolly rancher candy. He consumed an occasional chocolate bar or Hershey's Kiss. The soft, sweet Swedish fish or gummy bears were his candy of choice on any given day. But when it came to special occasions such as his birthday or Father's Day, the grandkids looked forward

to buying huge bags of candy for him nearly as much as he did consuming it. There was no one on this planet that enjoyed eating sweets as much as he did. I think it helped him get through long nights of painting.

I would often say, hey, Pop, how are you going to have that picture done by tomorrow if you haven't even started it yet? He would just give me that reassuring smile and reply, you go on to bed and when you wake up tomorrow, I will have it ready. Now I was only a little tot, and I didn't know what was involved in finishing a painting, but it still seemed impossible to accomplish in such a short period of time. But remarkably, when I got up the next morning, Dad sat in the kitchen sipping on a cup of (sugar) coffee with the finished painting propped up against the kitchen wall, looking over it with his eagle eyes. I was in awe. How could he do it so fast? He would turn, see me walk into the kitchen, and say, well, what do you think?

"Wow, Pop, that's cool! But how are you going to bring it to them when the paint is still wet?"

"I have my ways. Watch this."

As he put his cup of coffee down on the table, he would pick up the painting, turn the gas oven on high, and put me in a temporary state of shock. He put the painting into the oven over an open flame while swinging it back and forth so it wouldn't burn. After about 30 seconds he would take it out and wave it back and forth in the cool air of the kitchen. Then he would go through the process again.

I soon became even more frightened by what was happening. As the painting was pulled from the oven, it would begin to warp in the shape of the letter C. "Oh my God, Pop, what are you going to do now!"

My father was cool as a cucumber. Nothing ever startled him. There was a perfectly beautiful painting now distorted in to a letter C, and he was not worried a bit. "Watch this," he replied.

He'd walk over to the sink, grab a rag, and hold it under the faucet for a second. Then he would ring out the excess water and start wiping the back of the painting with the wet rag in long strokes. Amazingly, the painting reverted itself back to a flat canvas board before my eyes. It was like magic. My father was a magician in his own right. He seemed to know how to do anything he put his mind to.

I asked him if the painting was dry, and he told me not completely, but enough



**ABOVE: Frank working in his Pennsylvania studio on one of his masterpieces. RIGHT: Frank posing for a reference photo.**

to where he could carry it into the office without making a mess.

I would walk over to Dad and hug his thigh—that's about as high as I could get, at that age—and tell him I loved him.

Another time he almost screwed himself by telling the publisher the painting would be there by morning, guaranteed. The only problem was that he had run out of canvas board. I remember him running around the house like a madman, looking behind or under anything for a workable piece of canvas. I sat in the living room staring. This may have been the only time in his life—or my life, for that matter—that I had ever seen him in a desperate position. Back then, there were no Home Depots or 24 hour art stores open on Sunday. After Saturday at 5 PM, you were out of luck.

Eventually he disappeared into the hall closet and returned with a saw clenched in his hand. He walked down the stairs into the basement. Within a few minutes, I could hear him sawing something at the far end. I wasn't exactly sure what he was cutting up down there, but he was doing it very quickly

from the sound of the saw blade.

Mom then came walking into the room and asked me where Dad was. I told her that he was in the basement cutting some wood. She raised her eyebrows in confusion, then cried out, "Frank! What are you cutting up down there?" When Dad did not respond, she walked down the stairs to investigate.

When Mom came up from the basement, I asked her what Dad was doing. She said, "Your father's crazy! He forgot to buy more canvas board and now he's cutting a hole in the basement wall so he can finish a painting by tomorrow morning!"

I was confused until he walked up the stairs with an irregular shaped piece of hard board that just minutes ago had been part of our basement wall. He was sweating profusely, but he had that sign of relief on his face: he could move forward with his painting. Out of curiosity, I went downstairs to inspect what part of the basement he had removed, and there it was: a giant, square-shaped hole that gave a nice view into the laundry room. 🐼







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# Frank Frazetta

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Frank Frazetta, Jr.



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*Frank Frazetta Jr. takes readers on a tour through his father's journey from struggling comic artist to legend. Featuring never-before-seen originals from Frank Frazetta's private collection. With foreword by Kirk Hammett and afterword by Jerry "The King" Lawler.*

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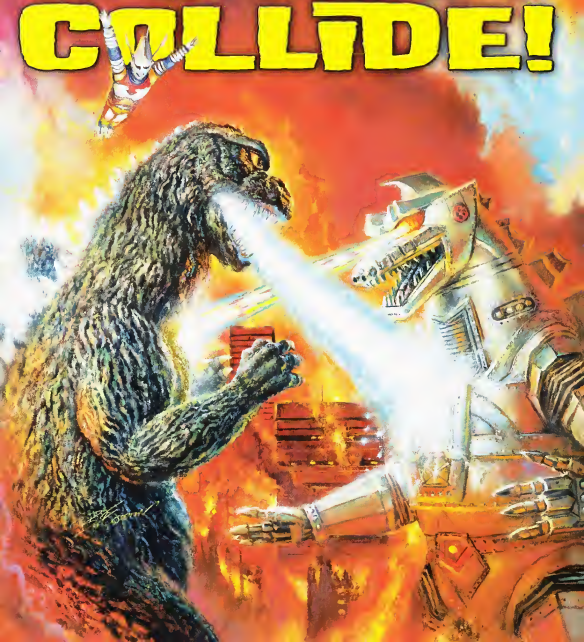
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# THE MEGA POWERS COLLIDE!



# Memories OF ISHIRO HONDA

## Twenty Years After The Passing of GODZILLA's Famed Director

by Hajime Ishida

Since ancient times, is customary for the Japanese to send New Year's cards to reach their recipients by first day of the New Year. This is similar to Christmas Cards in the West; however, there is a slightly different point. Christmas Cards are largely a pre-made product in which you write your own sentiments, but the Japanese use a generic, blank postcard and create personalized, individual designs for their New Year's Cards. When a lot of people began to use computer printers or print shops to make multiple copies of their designs, Ishiro Honda stuck to the traditional method of hand-drawing them one at a time, even though he must have had a very long list of people to send his

cards to. This is but one small example of the sincerity of his personality.

Every year, I eagerly awaited Mr. Honda's beautiful, hand-drawn New Year's Card. And of course, they always arrived promptly on January 1<sup>st</sup>. The last I received from him was on New Year's Day 1993: the year he passed away.

As Forrest J Ackerman still lives in many of our hearts, dear readers, Ishiro Honda is still living my mine. So, for this special issue of FM, I will write a few things about Mr. Honda and my memories of him. In an amazing coincidence, it was in 1977 that I first met Mr. Honda in person in Tokyo, and Forry in my hometown of Osaka for the first time—even though I had been

communicating with them for several years prior to our meeting. When I first became penpals with Forry in 1974, I was only 18 years old, and from that time onward, he always called me his "Japanese Son"!

It was in February of that year that I travelled to Tokyo to meet with Mr. Honda, which was just after I received a letter from Forry informing me that he was coming to visit that May! So when I met with Mr. Honda that day, I made sure to take a picture of him holding a copy of FM, just for Forry.

As I mentioned, I live in Osaka, and Mr. Honda lived in Tokyo—roughly the distance between San Francisco to Los Angeles—and I wasn't able to meet with him as often as I would've liked, so we



**BELOW: Discussing movies with Mr. Honda was so much fun. He later signed this photo, and inscribed, "Read good books, share good stories, create good works, and become a good man." RIGHT: Ishiro Honda and I (so young!) posing for photos with an original Famous Monsters magazine for my American Father Forry! (1977).**







本多猪四郎



**ABOVE:** Rare, never-before published color shot from *MOTHRA* (1961). **LEFT:** Mothra goes on a rampage through Tokyo's Shibuya ward! **OPPOSITE:** Autographed still of "GOJIRA" (1954) aka "GODZILLA, KING OF THE MONSTERS" (1956).



spoke frequently over the telephone. Not only did he share with me behind-the-scenes stories of his films, he also spoke happily about his thoughts on films he had just seen, and lots more. He spoke to me like one speaks to his grandson: "I'm a movie fan for life," he would say. This was another example of his sincerity of character and his honest personality. Those years were such bliss for me!

While there's no need to explain to FM's readers that Director Ishiro Honda is famous as the father of Godzilla, I think that the other aspects of his career are not as well known; so I'll write a little bit about his life before *GODZILLA* (1954).

Ishiro Honda was born on May 7, 1911 in Yamagata Prefecture. In 1933, he joined the motion picture industry as assistant director to P.C.L. (predecessor of Toho). And in 1937, when he became assistant director to Kajiro Yamamoto, one of Japan's biggest directors, he met fellow

assistant director Akira Kurosawa. The two quickly became best friends, and even shared a small apartment in their early careers. They called each other "Ino-san" (Mr. Ino) and "Kuro-san" (Mr. Kuro), and talked about movies every day.

In 1939, Honda was married and left the apartment, but at the end of that year, he was drafted into the Army and sent to China. However, the misery he witnessed first-hand on the battlefield turned Honda into an absolute pacifist. Meanwhile, Akira Kurosawa was not drafted, remained working at the studio, and directed his first feature in 1943. A prisoner of war, Honda returned home in 1946, by which time Kurosawa had helmed four films. Regardless, the two had continued their friendship while Honda was away by exchanging letters.

Honda returned to his job at the studio and made his directorial debut at the age of 40 with *THE BLUE PEARL*. (*Aoi Shinju*)

*"Godzilla is a symbol of nuclear bombs; no, to me, he's a walking nuclear bomb. So, I recreated the devastation of the cities that were A-bombed, for Godzilla's wake. Therefore, the act of Godzilla breathing fire, symbolizing the conflagration of nuclear bombs, was absolutely necessary."*

In 1951—the first Japanese film to employ an underwater camera. Over the next three years, he directed five more films, establishing him as one of Toho's most reliable directors.

1954 was a very important year for not only Toho, but for the Japanese film industry, itself, as well as becoming a banner, historical benchmark. Both Kurosawa's *SEVEN SAMURAI* (*Shichinin-no Samurais*) and Honda's *GODZILLA* were released that year. Even today, these two films are symbolized at front of the gates of Toho Studios, with a six-foot statue of Godzilla and a gigantic mural of the Seven. While both films were box office hits, *GODZILLA* in particular became a social phenomenon in Japan.

However, despite the financial windfall,

the evaluation of Japanese film critics was less than kind. Mr. Honda said to me, "At the time, they wrote things like, 'This movie is absurd, because such giant monsters do not exist.' Others said that depicting a fire-breathing organism was strange. However, I didn't feel any of these things about Godzilla were real questions. When I returned from the war, I passed through the A-bombed remains of Hiroshima, and I saw the result of an atomic explosion first-hand. Godzilla is a symbol of nuclear bombs; no, to me, he's a walking nuclear bomb. So I recreated the devastation of the cities that were A-bombed for Godzilla's wake. Therefore, the act of Godzilla breathing fire, symbolizing the conflagration of nuclear bombs, was absolutely necessary."

"The first film critics to appreciate





GODZILLA were those in the US. When GODZILLA was released there as GODZILLA: KING OF THE MONSTERS in 1956, the critics said such things as, 'For the start, this film frankly depicts the horrors of the atomic bomb.' And by these evaluations, the assessment began to impact critics in Japan, and has changed their opinions over the years."

In any case, GODZILLA was a record-breaking success. After the film's worldwide accolades, Honda was raised up as one of Toho's top hit filmmakers, and continued to helm similar films, including THE ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN (1955), KODAN (1956), THE MYSTERIANS (1957), THE H-MAN (1958), BATTLE IN

OUTER SPACE (1959), THE HUMAN VAPOR (1960), GORATH (1962), and many more. While there are many wonderful films, I'd like to share with you some interesting behind-the-scenes stories from two of his best-loved films, MOTHRA (1961) and FRANKENSTEIN CONQUERS THE WORLD (1965), told to me by Mr. Honda himself.

"For MOTHRA, Producer [Tomoyuki] Tanaka set up a plan to create a completely different monster movie from what we had previously produced. We asked three young novelists to create the original story, and Shinichi Sekizawa [VARAN] was responsible for the screenplay. During the screenplay development, Mr. Sekizawa

coined the term "Shobijin" (Little Beauties) for the twin fairies.

"In the finished film, the villain, played by Jerry Ito, flees to New Kirk City. However, in relation to shoot schedule and budget, we revised the ending to the villain being cornered in mountains of Kyushu [the southernmost island of Japan], which I rewrote with Mr. Sekizawa. Since there was a contact with a US studio [Columbia Pictures], Toho deliberated while awaiting approval for this change from the American side. Toho decided to not wait, and ordered me to start shooting this alternate ending on location [in Kagoshima, on the southwestern tip of Kyushu].

"So, I left for the shoot with the cast and crew before the reply came in. In fact, these scenes were start of principal photography. However, when we returned to the studio after getting everything safely in the can, Toho received a "No" answer from the US side, so we had to reshoot the ending after all. Unfortunately, the budget was stretched in creating the New Kirk City sets.

"And if that wasn't enough, another problem arose. While we were shooting in Kyushu, there was a scene where the villain, blown off by MOTHRA's wings, falls to his death, deep into a volcanic crater. We used a life-sized dummy for that shot, but the 2<sup>nd</sup> Unit crew didn't bother recovering it. After a few days, it was spotted by a group of climbers, who took it to be a suicide, and contracted the local authorities. Causing quite the uproar, the police immediately formed a rescue party, and scaled down the treacherous precipice, only to discover that it was a dummy. Needless to say, we were soundly scolded. Despite the hardships in shooting this footage, none of the film was ever developed."

Many years ago, I wondered if Mr. Honda and Mr. Tsuburaya may have intended MOTHRA to be their Japanese version of KING KONG. A few years later, I was able to have the opportunity to ask Mr. Honda directly, and he replied, "From the early planning stages with Mr. Tsuburaya, before the screenplay was written, the setting was an adventure set on a South Seas island, where a mysterious giant creature is worshipped as a god; there's also a Showman, and beauty [in this case, "Little Beauties"], causes a city to be rampaged. So, yes, this is a Japanese version of KING KONG. However, I wanted to make our final act a Happy Ending, and not like the denouement of KONG, which ended in tragedy."

When I heard this story, it brought me to tears, because I was so impressed by his depth of love for the monster.

"There've always been a lot of questions concerning the final scenes of **FRANKENSTEIN CONQUERS THE WORLD**," Mr. Honda told me. "In fact, Mr. Tsuburaya shot five or six final scenes for this film. The infamous Giant Octopus is only one of these endings. That is, the Top Brass of Toho was told that Giant Octopus scenes in **KING KONG VS. GODZILLA** (1962) was popular in the US, and so they wanted a similar scene in this production. But, in the end, it was rejected by the US side [Henry G. Saperstein] as "too abrupt," and was not used in either the respective US or Japanese releases. Furthermore, there was never any official plan to ever utilize the sequence; but an alternative print with that ending was accidentally aired on television, surprising many Japanese fans—because it was not the ending they had remembered from the original theatrical release."

With all of that being said, now I have a question for you, dear readers: Do you remember the original climax? Baragon and the colossal Frankenstein monster sinking together into a great fissure in the earth. But, while this is happening, Baragon was dead at Frankenstein's feet,

right? When I first saw this in a movie theater as a child, it was a different version from the ending most of us are familiar with. The colossal Frankenstein monster lifts the dead carcass of Baragon over his head, and while maintaining that position, they sink into the earth. Now, this isn't some faint, hazy childhood memory—all Japanese fans of my generation, who saw the film in its theatrical release, have the exact same memory! So, yes, this is yet another of those five or six final scenes shot by Mr. Tsuburaya for the film.

In 1971, Mr. Honda retired from Toho, but returned to helm **TERROR OF MECHAGODZILLA** (*Mekagajira-no Gyakushu*) in 1975). In 1978, Kurosawa asked Honda to be his "Supporting Director" (not merely an Assistant Director, but more akin to a Co-Director) on **KAGEMUSHA**. Ino-san said to Kuro-san, "I'll gladly do it; but I don't need the title or stipend. If you're going to pay me, take that money and hire more horses for the film."

After **KAGEMUSHA** (co-produced by Francis Ford Coppola, George Lucas, and Tomoyuki Tanaka), they made five more films together. Kuro-san was not good at handling child actors, so he asked Ino-san to do so. Also, Kuro-san's notorious personality was that of a spoiled child. When a shot didn't go well, he would yell

at the staff and storm off of the set and refuse to return. However, when Ino-san went to call on him, Kuro-san would return immediately to the set. One of Toho's staff members said, "Director Honda is the only man who can calm the Godzilla-like monster named Kurosawa."

In closing, let me introduce you to the words of the late Mr. Kurosawa, who told some friends concerning his long-time comrade, "There are scenes in his films where Godzilla, or other giant monsters, appear, with scores of people fleeing. The funny thing is, he has the authorities, such as the police, fulfill their duties by organizing crowd control. I think that regardless of whether they were railway station men or police officers, if Godzilla really appeared, they would be the first to run! But this is the honest heart of Ino-san."

Yes, this is the real personality of Ishiro Honda!

*Osaka-based author Hajime Ishida published and edited Japan's first horror magazine, Horror World, in 1980, and then served in the same capacity on the Japanese edition of Fangoria in 1994. Having helmed numerous fanzines and books on Universal and Hammer Horrors, his first novel was published in 1999. Now Forry's Japanese Son returns home to the pages of FM.*



**OPPOSITE: Autographed still of "FRANKENSTEIN CONQUERS THE WORLD" (1965).  
ABOVE: FRANKENSTEIN CONQUERS THE WORLD (1965).**

# INVASION OF THE JAPANESE GIANT PLASTIC ROBOTS!

by David Dopko

Growing up in the 1970s, I was introduced to some fantastic Japanese television shows and movies that focused on giant robots. My first memories are of the now iconic children's animated shows *ASTROBOY* and *GIGANTOR*—both produced in 1963—the granddaddies of the modern robot heroes. Then, one day, I turned on WPHL-17 and came across the amazing series *ULTRAMAN*! The original 39 episodes from 1966 did not really focus on robots or mechanical adversaries, but beginning with *ULTRA SEVEN* (1967), the series began to pit the hero against giant metallic foes! Robot adversaries were also plentiful in the many sequels to the original *ULTRAMAN*, and proved to be very popular indeed. Then came the series called *JOHNNY SOKKA AND HIS FLYING ROBOT* that focused on a young boy who controlled a giant atomic-powered robot who, along with the Unicorn Agency, protected the earth from the evil Emperor Guillotine and his henchmen the Gangster gang.

During the early 1970s, along with these TV shows, I also discovered the amazing Japanese films that dealt with the popular concept of Giant Monster vs. Giant Robot! My focus has been mainly on the films created by Japan's premier sci-fi fantasy film company, Toho, whose creative geniuses birthed the iconic radioactive monster Godzilla. I've also shared some photos of my personal collection of toys and models inspired by these fantastic mechanical creatures.

There were (and still are) many toy companies that produced toys and models of these amazing giant robots, beginning

with Marusan and Bullmark in the 1960s and '70s. Other notable figures were produced by Pony, Yamakatsu, Ban'in, Momo, M-Ichiro, Billiken, and most recently, X-Plus, to name a few. I would have been so incredibly thrilled if my collection of fantastic vinyl creations were able to take me here in the US when I was a kid! I remember watching *GODZILLA VS. THE SAIGON MONSTER* (1971) and being extremely envious of the boy, Kenji, playing with his arsenal of vinyl goodies!

Toho's first giant robotic creation to lumber across movie screens was called *Mechani-Kong*. It was from the space-themed alien-invasion film *THE MYSTERIOUS*, released in 1957. Mogera was an enormous giant (Godzilla-sized) robot that resembled a metallic Art Deco Samurai with a gyro-peak and rabbit ear antennae! It sported powerful laser beams that could destroy armies, and it could tunnel beneath the earth. In the early '90s (just about when I began my collection), the Bandai toy company released a 9" Mogera figure in the popular line of figures from the Godzilla series. Mogera reappeared in 1994 in the film *GODZILLA VS. SPACE GODZILLA*. Dubbed *M.O.O.P.E.R.* (Mobile Operation G-Expert Robot Army-type) this time around, the green mechanical ally was built and operated by the United Nations' G-Force unit to help vanquish giant monsters! Bandai released the 1994 version in the standard 7" scale and later reissued the figure in the *G-Monster Island* series.

The year 1967 saw the return of King Kong to the big screen—a giant ape to which he engaged in epic battle with his robotic doppelgänger *Mechani-Kong*! The film was *KING KONG ESCAPES*. The design for *Mechani-Kong* was sleek and streamlined, and far superior to the underwhelming Kong suit, which I feel was actually a step down from the one used in *KING KONG VS. GODZILLA* (1962). All in all, the film was great fun and spawned several toys and kits depicting the mecha-fighters. The very first vinyl toy of the mecha-mech Kong was produced by Marusan in 1967 and reissued by Bullmark in 1970. My first *Mechani-Kong* figure was Bullmark's 1970 version released in 1991. I purchased this from a dusty little collectibles shop in New York City called *Children of Paradise*. He was my only *Mechani-Kong* figure until I found the very rare *Billiken* 1967 vinyl





model kit on eBay last year! I had a blast making my very own version of Dr. Who's *Doctor Who*'s creation. Billiken's release of the finest representations of the creature is late.

Bandai introduced their next giant robot in the film *GODZILLA VS. MEGALON* in 1973, by the name of Jet Jaguar. There were several toys and models of this colorful robot hero, beginning with two vinyl figures, standard and middle-sized, by Bulmark in the early 1970s. In 1993, Bandai released their 9" vinyl version, and in 2003, Gigabrain released an excellent Jet Jaguar collectible in 2006. It is a really fantastic figure that actually has 15 joints of articulation! Billiken also released an awesome pre-painted 30cm vinyl model kit of Jet Jaguar in the mid-2000s that is on my wish list! The company X-Plus released two very realistic figures as well in their 25cm Giant Monster series, which are amazing.

1974 was the year that gave us the colorful giant-monster-against-giant-monster film. I am, of course, talking about the incredible match up between Godzilla and the ineffectual cyborg Mechagodzilla.

In fact, I was first made aware of this film by the colorful artwork on the cover of *Famous Monsters* #135 by the very talented Basil Gogos! I loved the design of Godzilla's robot double, and wished that there were toys and figures of him that I could get my hands on!

In Japan, there were several toys to choose from by Bulmark, the front-runners at the time, who later issued a die-cast metal toy in 1977 that could fire missiles and rockets. A year later, Popy (a division of Bandai) issued a missile-firing "Chogokin" (Super Alloy) diecast version. I would have loved to have gotten my hands on those back then! My first MG toy was Bandai's 9" vinyl figure, released in 1984. Bandai went on to ultimately release a very realistic and poseable die-cast version that is truly a work of art. Marmit and X-Plus have also released very collectable MG figures.

The sequel, called *TERROR OF MECHAGODZILLA*, was released a year later in 1975, and saw the return of Godzilla's greatest foe. In the film, aliens recovered the remains of the destroyed MG and built a new and improved version of the evil cyborg to fight along with the dinosaur



**OPPOSITE:** Taha Takusatsu Super Deformed Hero collection featuring Mechagodzilla '74, Jet Jaguar, and Mogera '57.

**ABOVE:** Bandai's Jet Jaguar Gashapon (candy toy).

**LEFT:** Bandai's Mechagodzilla '74 and Disguised Mechagodzilla '74.





Titanosaurus for world supremacy. This film, as usual, spawned many toys and models of MG-2. Aside from the usual players, Billiken released a soft vinyl 30cm model kit in the 1990s, which is probably my favorite representation of the character. The detail on this kit is incredible, and it has movable parts and metal finger missiles! Bandai also did a superb job on the release of their 6" MG-2 figure. I am looking forward to the upcoming release of the X-Plus 25cm version, that I will actually have by the time this article reaches print.

The next Toho mechanized creation would not surface until 1991, with the release of *GODZILLA VS. KING GHIDORAH*. This entry in the Godzilla universe is probably the most innovative and thought-provoking film in the entire series! This time around, King Ghidorah was defeated and ultimately revived and upgraded to a part organic, part cybernetic adversary to Godzilla.

The design of Mecha King Ghidorah is indeed beautiful and inventive. The center head is a robotic duplicate of the other two and can emit an even more destructive laser ray. Metal wings and leg supports also give the creature a fantastic cybernetic look.



There were of course several toys and models of Mecha King Ghidorah, two of which were created by Bandai and were probably the most popular. In the 2000s, Marmit did a beautifully designed vinyl figure for their popular Monster Heavens line. The model kit company Kaiyodo released an extremely detailed resin model kit that looks awesome, but also looks as if it requires tons of work to assemble and paint.

Mechagodzilla was featured in Toho's next film dealing with robotic adversaries, *GODZILLA VS. MECHAGODZILLA II*, and this time, the robot was on the side of the humans. Scientists utilized future technology by salvaging the remains of Mecha King Ghidorah and created a new Mechagodzilla. The design of this new Mechagodzilla closely resembled the power and bulk of the 1993 Godzilla suit, but lacked the sleek, angular design of the '70s version. The robot again had the power of flight, and also full arsenal of damaging lasers and rockets. The variety of toys and models of this new Mechagodzilla again did not disappoint collectors. I only have the 9" and 6" vinyl versions of Mechagodzilla released by Bandai. Kaiyodo did a very stylized soft vinyl model kit version of the robot that actually is an improvement over the original design.

The character of Mechagodzilla was yet again resurrected for the series of Godzilla films made in the wake of the US remake disaster—*GODZILLA AGAINST MECHAGODZILLA* (2002) and *GODZILLA TOKYO SOS* (2003).



In yet another reimagining of his iconic Mecha-Godzilla, now baring the name designation *Kiryu* (Mechanical Dragon), was created by DNA salvaged from the bones of the first Godzilla designed in 1954. The design of Kiryu is a melding of the '70s and '90s versions, flawless incorporating the massive bulk of the Godzilla created for this film with the good angles of the original Mechagodzilla. The capability of flight was again added, as well as many deadly rockets and lasers. The most destructive weapon was the Atomic Zero Cannon (a variation of the weapon of mass destruction from Toho's 1963 sci-fi adventure *ATRAKON*). A number of


"While I've looked back so fondly on those rainy Saturdays of my youth watching these imaginative, exciting, and just plain FUN films, Toho and other film studios have continued to create, upgrade, and evolve these entertaining Giant Robot story concepts and leave us fans wanting more."



**OPPOSITE** (from left): Bandai's Monster Series M.O.G.U.E.R.A. '94; **APES** '62 Kong vs. Billiken's Mechani-Kong; Bandai's Mogera '57 Gashapon (capsule toy). **THIS PAGE** (clockwise from top): Bandai's Mecha King Ghidorah '91 Gashapon; Bandai's Mechagodzilla '93; **MECHAGODZILLA** '03 diorama.



Kiryu toys were available from Bandai, while Marmit created several versions in various color schemes. There was also a large Kiryu vinyl released by Banpresto (another division of Bandai) for arcade crane machines in Japan.

While I've looked back so fondly on those rainy Saturdays of my youth watching these imaginative, exciting, and just plain FUN films, Toho and other film studios have continued to create, upgrade, and evolve these entertaining Giant Robot story concepts and leave us fans wanting more. Meanwhile, the upcoming PACIFIC RIM is shaping up to be a worthy addition to these amazing movies, and I for one am really looking forward to it—not to mention the toys and collectables that it will inevitably spawn! 



# GODZILLA VS MECHAGODZILLA

TECHNOLOGICAL TERROR MEETS THE KING OF MONSTERS!

by Bob Eggleton

By 1974, twelve sequels and 20 years had passed since the birth of Toho's biggest franchise—Godzilla. The 1970s had not been kind to the Japanese movie business. Production costs were skyrocketing due to the “Oil Shock” (Energy Crisis) that had struck the previous year. While Japanese films had once dominated the domestic box office, foreign films—especially big Hollywood disaster pictures (which were cheaper to import than producing domestic films)—were at the top of the heap. Meanwhile, Toho's visual effects pictures, namely Godzilla, were underperforming due to the explosion of similar television programs, which chipped away larger chunks of their audience every week.

Post-1968, the Godzilla series, geared specifically for children in annual “Toho Champion Festival” packages, became a series of “anything goes” affairs. The previous four pictures had been, essentially, non-linear approaches to storytelling—experiments to find out what theme was working for younger audiences. Since 1974 was the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of The Big

G, Producer Tomoyuki Tanaka wanted to plan something a little more unusual for the auspicious occasion. This eventually led to the creation of what is today perhaps the second most popular and iconic *kaiju* creation: Mechagodzilla.

At the beginning, there was a lot of bandying about of ideas, many of which either fell to the wayside or were picked up for later pictures. Out of the starting gate, since this was a celebratory production, Toho allocated somewhat of a larger budget for the movie than the previous entries. GODZILLA VS. GIGAN (1972), for instance, was so bare-bones for a studio picture that it featured monster suits that were noticeably outdated, employed a cornucopia of stock footage, and—perhaps the most betraying—scrapped together an entire score from Akira Ifukube's previous cues from past films.

Conversely, there was a wealth of ideas suggested for this 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary outing, including a very inspired concept from producer Tanaka precluding the creation of Mechagodzilla, based on then-current

world events and tying in the threat of nuclear holocaust that was the very foundation of the original 1954 film: Japan caught between political superpowers. The set up is simple, and the intriguing dilemma is made manifest through monsters: “Two new Godzillas are spawned from US and Chinese nuclear test sites and converge on Japanese soil to clash with the real Godzilla, who must fend off these threats from the East and West.”

Eventually, this idea was dropped (although a second Godzilla, who is actually a disguised Mechagodzilla, is featured prominently in the final film). Shinichi Sekizawa, scribe of many of the most successful films of the '60s, and science fiction author Masami Fukushima (MATANGO) submitted another early idea: “Giant Monsters Converge in Okinawa! Big Duel on Cape Zampa” (*Daikaiju Okinawa ni Shugo! Zanpamisaki-no Daiketto!*). In the usual fashion of movie conceiving, this became a “musical chairs” contest of monsters, with the idea of it being a major monster show. Godzilla, Angirus, Mothra,

and a new *kaiju* called "Garugan" (brought to earth by extraterrestrials called, of course, Garugas), as well as an elemental *kaiju* called "King Caesar" worshipped by Okinawa's ancient Azumi Clan, were all suggested as players.

A new of the screenplay dropped Mothra and Anguirus, while Garugan became Mechagodzilla; and Gigan, now under the control of aliens from "Planet R", was added from the previous two Godzilla films. Finally, the script "Big Duel on Cape Zampa: Godzilla vs. Mechagodzilla" (*Zanpamisaikino Daiketto Gojira tai Mekagogojira*) emerged, which dropped Gigan from the proceedings and was pared down to four monsters (likely due to budget): Godzilla, Anguirus, Mechagodzilla, and King Caesar, with most of the final battle taking place on Okinawa and not mainland Japan.

Taking the helm once again after the previous year's *GODZILLA VS. MEGALON*, venerable action director Jun Fukuda was given charge of this project—his fifth Godzilla picture, and his third and last of the '70s. In all of Fukuda's Godzilla outings, he brings a different visual feel to the series, with a lush palette, bright clothing, and unexpected color gels. He also contributed greatly to the final screenplay as co-writer, based on original drafts by Sekizawa and Fukushima. Okinawa was chosen as the location of the story on account of the coming of Expo '75, the international World's Fair held from July 20, 1975 to January 18, 1976.

Capitalizing on the success of the Tokyo Broadcasting System's highly rated Christmas broadcast of Franklin J. Schaffner's *PLANET OF THE APES* (1968) in 1973, Toho decided to "Go Ape" as well. This being the mid-1970s, the story had to feature elements popular with other mainstream films—notably, intergalactic simian invaders who seemed quite familiar to audiences around the world. Even Tsuburaya Productions (the producers

of *ULTRAMAN*) decided to monkey-see-monkey do with the television series *ARMY OF THE APES*—infamously known in the US as *TIME OF THE APES*. Fukuda also worked in copious amounts of visceral brutality and bloodletting, a sign of the then-current trend of violent gangster films, in a much more adult-oriented story than the previous '70s Godzilla films.

In a possible attempt to recapture the mood of the mid-'60s movies, one of the subtexts of *MECHAGODZILLA* is the contentious social and historical tension between the Japanese mainlanders and the native Okinawans. The screenplay of

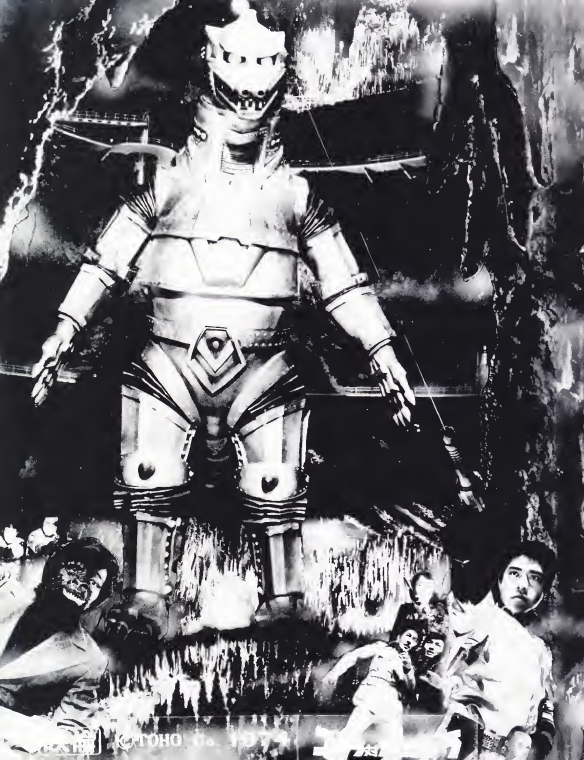
*MECHAGODZILLA* was also unusual for its noticeable absence of both the Japanese Self Defense Forces and the United States Forces Japan, both stationed in the territory. The inclusion of any foreign military on Okinawan soil in the film may have been seen as controversial. Additionally, any connections to children, as in most of the past four films, were also conspicuously absent.

On the other hand, while the previous adventure had no female protagonists, *MECHAGODZILLA* features three: Archeologist Saeko Kaneshiro (Reiko Tajima), the daughter of Professor Miyajima; Ikuko (Hiromi Miyashita); and

**SEE THE MIGHTY GODZILLA IN A FIGHT TO THE DEATH  
WITH HIS COSMIC DOUBLE!**







東宝 1954

**OPPOSITE:** Classic Toho collage publicity photo encapsulating the thrills of GODZILLA VS. MECHAGODZILLA! **RIGHT:** Holy leaping Shisas of Okinawa!

**BELOW:** Godzilla and his mechanical double face off in a fiery holocaust of electrifying violence!



宇宙をとり、サイルを撃ち込む！全身が武器の真いゴジラが現われた！

ゴジラ誕生20周年記念映画

東宝  
チャンピオン  
まつり



キング・オブ・ザ・サウ



# ゴジラ対メカゴジラ

a descendent of the Azumi Royalty, Nami Kuniyami (Barbara Lynn).

As the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary production, MECHAGODZILLA starred many of Toho's new young and energetic stars as well as popular veterans of the genre. Masaaki Daimon (as Keisuke Shimizu) was awarded a Élan d'Or for Best Newcomer in 1974 from the All Nippon Producers Association, and is still busy acting to this day. Playing Keisuke's younger brother, Masahiko, singer Kazuya Aoyama's first acting gig was in the television drama, A CENTURY OF THE EMPEROR (1971), and was cast as the lead in the Toho television series ZONE FIGHTER (1973). As Saeko Kaneshiro, Reiko Tajima had an extremely prolific acting career on screens big and small, on stage, and as a well-known voice talent, and is perhaps best known for her role providing the voice for the space pirate Emeraldus in the various GALAXY EXPRESS 999 productions and spin-offs.

The veterans aboard for the ride included supporting roles from Akihiko Hirata, who played the tragic Dr. Daisuke Serizawa in the original GODZILLA (1954), as Professor Hideto Miyajima; and Hiroshi Koizumi, who played Shoichi Tsukioka in GODZILLA RAIDS AGAIN (1955), as Professor Wagura. Kenji Sahara (RODAN) was featured in a cameo role as the Captain of the Queen Coral ferry—a nice tip of the hat to the classic films of the '60s. Two other important and memorable supporting roles were given by Shin Kishida (LAKE OF DRACULA) as Interpol Agent Nanbara and Goro Mutsumi (THE WAR IN SPACE) as Kuronuma, leader of the invaders. As for the men-in-suits, Godzilla would be played by Isao Zushi (who also played evil robots in SUPER ROBOT: RED BARON), Mechagodzilla by Issei Mori, and taking on both Anguirus and King Caesar would be Kinichi Kusumi (which also could explain why these monsters are not in the same scenes together).

An amazing creation, Mechagodzilla owes its concept to the 1967 Toho/ Rankin Bass feature KING KONG ESCAPES. Tomoyuki Tanaka said at the press conference, "A while back,

I had mechanical Kong, so why not a mechanical Godzilla?"—an allusion to the abovementioned film's "Mechani-Kong". In charge of the film's visual effects, Teruyoshi Nakano (SUBMERSON OF JAPAN) placed future visual effects director Koichi Kawakita (GUNHED) in charge of overseeing the creation of Mechagodzilla. While the final appearance of the mechanical monster differed greatly from the original concept art by Akihiko Iguchi (ZONE FIGHTER), in an odd quirk, the concept art was used in most of the final promotional materials, including the poster for the film.

Mechagodzilla was conceived as a "tin wind-up version of Godzilla"—what Kawakita now claims is a forerunner to Steampunk. Indeed, his look is antiquated, yet alien; sporting an angular, welded design, complete with visible pop rivets, vents, heat-ray eyes, missiles, and a shorter tail than Godzilla that is better used in flying. Prosthetics department stalwarts Tomoki Kobayashi and Nobuyuki Yasumaru built the Mechagodzilla suit. The head, hands, wrists, and feet were made of a fiber reinforced plastic. The body was made of a hard sponge substance, coupled with a material used to make rubber bath mats. Its teeth were made with clear resin, which unfortunately didn't register on camera, and its eyes were modified automobile taillights. A smaller, half-sized miniature in flying mode was carved

from the wood of a Kapok tree, making it extremely lightweight. Air jets and lights were installed on the soles of its feet to give the impression of jet propulsion.

Anguirus is the first monster seen in



**OPPOSITE:** Japanese poster artwork for the 1974 release. **TOP RIGHT:** Launch, Mechagodzilla! **RIGHT:** Okinawa Monster Beach Party!



©TOMO Co. 1974





**OPPOSITE (top to bottom): Original King Shisa production design; Mechagodzilla needs a hug; "Two Godzillas? What does it mean?"; The King meets his Bionic Double! ABOVE: The explosive**

the film, which opens with a stunning panorama of the snow-covered terrain of Siberia. Later, Anguirus confronts a rather odd-trumpeting "Godzilla" (who has burst out of a giant boulder hurled from an inexplicably erupting Mt. Fuji) and is dispatched rather early on in a gruesome manner. However, publicity stills incorrectly depict the spiky quadruped as being part of the final confrontation. Like Godzilla, Anguirus was a refurbished, threadbare suit from the production of *DESTROY ALL MONSTERS* (1968) which had also been employed for *GODZILLA VS. GIGAN* (1972)—now missing his saber fangs and shot at angles to conceal the poor condition of the suit. The furry King Caesar was the only other original creation whipped up for this production, by Kobayashi and Yasumaru, from designs by Akihiko Iguchi, and based on the legendary "Shisa" guardian lion-dogs of Okinawan mythology, which were invoked to vanquish dragons and other threats.

Koichi Kawakita claims that most of the

film's budget was expended on location shooting on a cruise ship and in Okinawa itself, leaving little money for visual effects. Teruyoshi Nakano, however, tells another story: that because of the previous year's tremendously successful *SUBMERSSION OF JAPAN* (1973) and its wealth of visual effects, *MECHAGODZILLA* had been granted not only a better budget, but inherited some outtakes. Known as "The B Roll", the extra footage contained shots of an exploding oil refinery that came in handy, fitting in seamlessly with new shots of Godzilla and his mechanical doppelganger fighting in a burning oil field. This was quite a nice advantage, since the previous two films were rife with embarrassing stock-shots to make up for budget shortages.

In one standout scene where Godzilla appears to confront the disguised Mechagodzilla at the oil refinery, a poorly made "performance suit" (used for public appearances) was briefly used to show two Godzillas in one shot. It's glaring, but budget demanded a few

shortcuts. In seconds, Godzilla burns off the doppelganger Godzilla's "skin", revealing... Mechagodzilla!

Conceived and produced for Toho's Champion Festival children's matinee series, *GODZILLA VS. MECHAGODZILLA* opened in Japan on March 21, 1974. Due to the nature of the limited release and the reduced numbers of theaters screening the matinee package, the receipts would seem to indicate its underperformance at the box office. The reality was that the films were expensive to produce, the target audience was limited, and the profit margin didn't add up. The handwriting was on the wall, despite an attempt to reinvigorate the franchise.

The film didn't see release in the US until more than three years later via Cinema Shares Corp./Downtown Releasing, under the title *GODZILLA VS. THE BIONIC MONSTER*—that is, until Universal Television, producers of the then-hot series *THE SIX MILLION DOLLAR MAN* and *THE BIONIC WOMAN*, balked and threatened to sue when early promotional materials baring this title emerged.





Swiftly, it was retitled **GODZILLA VS. THE COSMIC MONSTER** to cash in on **STAR WARS**. While Cinema Shares had given **GODZILLA VS. MEGALON** a wide roadshow release the previous summer, **COSMIC MONSTER** seemed to fall through the cracks. It finally reached a wider audience in the spring of 1978, when Cinema Shares unleashed a triple bill of **MEGALON**, **COSMIC MONSTER**, and the "new" film, **GODZILLA ON MONSTER ISLAND** (actually **GODZILLA VS. GIGAN** from 1972, finally seeing a US release).

As a concept, Mechagodzilla would become Toho's second most popular rival to the Big G. He would appear in the follow-up, **TERROR OF MECHAGODZILLA** (1975), directed by Ishiro Honda, and then reimagined in design as a weapon of mankind in **GODZILLA VS MECHAGODZILLA II** (1993). Never ones to waste a concept, Toho gave the robot monster an appearance in **GODZILLA AGAINST MECHAGODZILLA** (2002) and its direct sequel **GODZILLA: TOKYO SOS** (2003), largely due to his increasing popularity over the years. Of course, he would soon be parodied by **SOUTH PARK** as the "Mecha Streisand"!

With five incarnations so far, Mechagodzilla has taken his place in the top four A-List Toho monsters, which include (of course) Godzilla, King Ghidorah, and Mothra. He was ranked at #15 in the UK's *The Times*' 2007 magazine poll of the "Top 50 Movie Robots"—beating out C-3PO, Optimus Prime, and the T-1000 from **TERMINATOR 2: JUDGEMENT DAY**.

While it didn't gain a fully appreciative audience at the time, **GODZILLA VS. MECHAGODZILLA** has aged well and, among *kaiju* fans, it's arguably the best of the '70s Godzilla movies, with its straightforward, mature plot and copious amounts of action set pieces. Now, here comes **PACIFIC RIM**... can Guillermo del Toro's Jaegers stand up to the technological terror that is Mechagodzilla? **A**

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TOHO Co. 1974 ゴジラ対メカゴジラ

Mechagodzilla, now available with an easy twist-off cap!



There's always that one film that fans seem to dislike in which others revel, like *GODZILLA'S REVENGE* (1969), while there are also those with no redeeming values whatsoever, such as *GODZILLA FINAL WARS* (2005). And then we have the black sheep—the proverbial red-headed stepchild of the *kaiju eiga*—or at least, that's what a lot of fans would lead you to believe. Call it what you will, but 1973's *GODZILLA VS. MEGALON*, featuring a colossal monster-punching, color-breaking Jet Jaguar (a precursor to the Jaegers in this summer's highly-anticipated *kaiju* vs. mecha epic, *PACIFIC RIM*)—has a strange power that makes you feel like a kid again, if you only let yourself see it through the eyes of a child.

In western culture, the number 13 is an ominous one. In Japan, there is no such stigma; even so, the 13th entry in the *Godzilla* film series is probably the most maligned and lambasted—even more so than the infamous *GODZILLA VS. MEGALON* (aka *GODZILLA VS. THE*

SMOG MONSTER, 1971). Jun Fukuda's *GODZILLA VS. MEGALON* was looked upon by film critics in the US as a joke ("Is this what the Japanese are passing off as science fiction these days?"), not realizing that the film was intended, from its inception, as a Kiddie Matinee presentation packaged with several other short subjects: Isao Takahata's animated featurette *PANDA! GO, PANDA! THE RAINY DAY CIRCUS*, Masahiro Takase's *GO ON, YOUTH!*, and a television episode of the Fujio-Fujiko animated series *KUROBEI OF THE JUNGLE*.

After Ishiro Honda's *DESTROY ALL MONSTERS* (1968), Producer Tomoyuki Tanaka thought that if the *Godzilla* series were to continue, the films would have to be specifically made and marketed towards children. This new dictum commenced in 1969 with the production of Honda's *GODZILLA'S REVENGE* as part of Toho's "Champion Festivals", a package of cartoons and re-edited *kaiju eiga* to keep kids occupied for hours while their

parents shopped. While the effects team was reshuffled after the untimely passing of Eiji Tsuburaya in 1970, it was another year before Toho released an all-new film, *GODZILLA VS. HEDORA*, directed by Yoshimitsu Banno (currently a producer on Gareth Edward's upcoming *Godzilla* reboot). While relatively successful, it was too much of a "head picture" for children, so the following entries were scaled-down, straightforward action films, with little in terms of plot and long monster battles.

After several aborted plans for co-productions in regards to a new *Godzilla* adventure for 1973, it was decided to move forward with an in-house production under the Toho-Eizo banner. Tanaka tapped veteran screenwriter Shinichi Sekizawa (*MOTHA VS. GODZILLA*), to draft a series of plot submissions. In keeping with the environmental themes of the previous pair of entries, the focus of the film would be its anti-nuclear stance—loosely based on the detonation of Cannikin on November 6, 1971, the

## GIANT AGAINST GIANT... the ultimate battle!



thirteenth and largest underground nuclear test of Operation Grommet. Sekizawa's first draft was entitled "Megalo vs. Godzilla: Undersea Kingdom Annihilation Operation," before being shortened to **GODZILLA VS. MEGALO** (Toho added the "n" to "Megalo" for foreign sales).

Because of the compressed pre-production schedule, Sekizawa, while credited as co-author of the screenplay, only worked on the basic plot submissions and concepts (Seatopia, an undersea kingdom, declares war on the surface world because of nuclear testing), as well as penning lyrics for the film's theme songs. The sole responsibility in writing the film's screenplay fell on director Fukuda (IRONFINGER)—a masculine scenario devoid of female characters (save for a troupe of Seatopian dancing girls). Interestingly, in the screenplay, the main character speaks of the irony that Godzilla and the Seatopians are both the victims of nuclear testing—a line that was omitted from the final version of the film. Because of the tight budget afforded the production, only two sets were built—the interior of the Ibuki residence/laboratory and the Seatopian Kingdom square—while the majority of the film was shot at various locations over a three-week period.

Additionally, **MEGALON** was conceived to take in on the *He-Man* "Boom!"—an explosion of B-movie superhero programs taking Japanese television by storm—by throwing an Ultraman-like automaton into the mix: Jet Jaguar. Despite this karate-chopping



electronic wunderkind-cum-prodigal son being on the wrong end of too many jibes, Jet Jaguar's concept and execution is pitch perfect, and he should be rightfully accepted into the pantheon of Japanese Superheroes. From a child's perspective, he serves as a big brother, a protector, and a friend—and while he doesn't possess the myriad beam weapons of Ultraman, he also doesn't have to hide behind a human guise: he's Jet Jaguar 24/7, ever ready to tackle any and all threats to mankind! To put it succinctly, Jet Jaguar rocks.

Originally, the character started out as "Red Arrow" (as in "Arrow"), conceived jointly by Toho and Tsuburaya Productions (the makers of ULTRAMAN) as the central figure in a proposed production, "Kiddie Kaiju Campus," for the megalithic Seiyu Department Store chain. The original design featured Jet Jaguar's familiar torso, but with a living, monsterish head and giant, devilish bad wings. When it was decided to incorporate the character into the next Godzilla film, it was transformed into a robotic character—capitalizing on the massive popularity of animated superheroes and live action superhero television series—into "Jet Arrow" (whose name appeared on the first advertising materials for the film), before being rechristened with the more familiar moniker of "Jet Jaguar" (but still sporting the "arrow" motif).

Designed by Akihiko Iguchi (ULTRAMAN ACE), the colorful Jet Jaguar was constructed by Toho Special Art Department veterans Tomoki Kobayashi and Nobuyuki Yasunari. Its head (and permanent smile) was sculpted and then cast in fiberglass—the interior of the eyes modified from a pair of car tail lights—while the suit was built-up from a rubber neoprene skin-diver's wetsuit by laminating foam rubber details. Additionally,

there were two flying models of Jet Jaguar, the main being a three-foot miniature built from wood and fiberglass. Two different suit actors, Tsugutoshi Komada and Masachika Mori, played the heroic robot, presumably for human-sized and giant-sized action scenes.

While Director Fukuda came up with the concept of Jet Jaguar's journey from human-sized servant to over-sized *kaiju* fighter, the transition proved problematic to realize for visual effects director Teruyoshi Nakano. "It really didn't go as well as it could have... looking back [at these scenes] is still painful for me." This is somewhat tragic, since the majority of superhero series of the time featured colorful and memorable transformation scenes. It makes you wonder what Nakano could've done with a better production schedule and budget. As it stands, all of the battles were set in the countryside to save on building miniature real estate, and according to Nakano, he was only given a fourth of the standard shooting schedule to get the visual effects in the can—a mere two weeks.

GODZILLA VS. MEGALON has been accused of being more padded with stock footage than Fukuda's GODZILLA VS. GIGAN (1972), but this is just not true—simply watch the films side by side. While a decidedly low-budget affair, MEGALON seems far more polished in comparison—albeit far more juvenile—to its predecessor.

The film's crisp location cinematography by Yuzuru Aizawa (Assistant Cameraman on Kurosawa's HIGH AND LOW) seems better adept than that of GIGAN's Kiyoshi Hasegawa; and is bolstered by the sharp editing of Michiko Ikeda (SHIOSAI). For a low budget affair, MEGALON does look impressive on the big screen, despite the negatives working against it.

MEGALON, surprisingly, features four brand-new monster suits, including those for the returning Gigan and Godzilla (as channeled through a Sesame Street character, it seems), despite having suits left over from the previous film. But these suits had a dual purpose, since Godzilla and Gigan would also be used in the upcoming Toho television series ZONE FIGHTER (1973). Often mistakenly called a "giant cockroach," the Megalon character, played by suit actor Hideto Date, was conceived as a hybrid between a Cicada and a Rhinoceros Beetle—two insects that scored high with Japanese children at the time, according to Nakano—while Megalon's curious leaping was inspired by another popular insect, the Grasshopper. The Megalon suit was constructed using fiberglass for the head, horn, mandibles, drill arms, and shell, while the rest of the suit was built up from hard sponge and rubber bath mats.

Interestingly, "Megalo" was a name that first appeared in early story drafts for GIGAN, but was for a completely different

**OPPOSITE (from top): 1976 American release poster; Megalon; Director Jun Fukuda during the Jet Jaguar costume check. RIGHT: A Mexican release lobby card, and the real hero of the story, Jet Jaguar!**



monster than what appears in either film, described only as a "tactile creature that emits a strange, smog-like gas." Since Megalon and Jet Jaguar were substantially different than previous Toho monsters, the battle scenes were given a lighter, more tag-team, pro-wrestling flavor, supervised by stunt coordinator Takamitsu Watanabe of the Japan Fighting Actors action team. Watanabe would appear in the cast of both the television series SPECTREMAN (1971) and GODZILLA VS. MECHAGODZILLA (1974). Primarily an action director, Fukuda also wanted to add some excitement for the live action scenes and came up with the outrageous car chase, shot by the visual effects crew and performed by Team Samba (Yasuo Masumura's ARTERY ARCHUPELAGO).

Even though the monster's battlefields were sparse hills by country roads and the city destruction was relegated to model locations from film stock, MEGALON, THE THREE-HEADED MONSTER (UMA) that was sent into various Japanese cities was a creature that destroyed the Chichibu mountain road.

dum in Saitama Prefecture), built and shot in 1/25 scale on the Toho backlot to take advantage of natural daylight. If this can even be said in the context of MEGALON, the scene is a *tour de force* of miniature work, editing, lighting, and cinematography (by Motoyoshi Tomioka), and just may be one of the best sequences of the five '70s Godzilla entries. "That was the single point of luxury we were allowed out of [the film's] meager budget," Nakano proudly commented.

The all-male cast was headed up by Katsuhiko Sasaki (Kihachi Okamoto's THE BATTLE OF OKINAWA, 1971), son of the legendary Minoru Chiaki ("Teihachi" in Kurosawa's SEVEN SAMURAI), plays inventor Goro Ibuki, while child actor Hiroshi Kawase (Kurosawa's DODES'KADEN, 1970), who headlined in HEDORAH, played his kid brother Rokuro "Bebe." Yutaka Hayashi, the drummer of the Village Singers (also a well-known television comic and emcee), featured as the hit Jinkawa. Stuntman Shinji Takagi took over the role of Godzilla, after Haruo Nakajima retired from acting in 1974 while

Kengo Nakayama (Okamoto's INCIDENT AT BLOOD PASS) returned to play Gigan. Nakayama later became the suit actor for RETURN OF GODZILLA (1984) through GODZILLA VS. DESTROYAH (1994) under the name Kenpachiro Satsuma. A seemingly embarrassed Robert Dunham (MOTHRA, 1961) shows up in a silky toga and tiara as Antonio, the leader of Seapopia.

The odd and usually derided electronic/jazz fusion soundtrack for MEGALON was scored by Riechiro Manabe, a notable composer with credits that include Nagisa Oshima's CRUEL STORY OF YOUTH and THE SUN'S BURIAL. Manabe is usually dismissed over noted Godzilla composer Akira Ifukube for his trumpeting "Godzilla Theme", while the remainder of these scores are contrarily both contemporary and eerily effective (such as the lake-draining scene in MEGALON). "Jet Jaguar and Godzilla, Punch! Punch! Punch!" the infamous closing anthem (released on the Toho Records label as a 45rpm Single), was performed by legendary vocalist Masato Shimon, who specialized in anime and superhero theme songs, and



Haill! Haill! The gang's all here... "Hey, Jet Jaguar just photobombed us!"



was responsible for dozens of memorable hits, including vocals for GATCHAMAN (1972), KIKAIIDA 01 (1973), and BRAVE RAIDEEN (1975).

For everything negative leveled against it, the bottom line is that MEGALON is an honest, straightforward children's monster movie, with colorful characters, anthropomorphic monster action, copious amounts of violence (which was typical of its day), and is just a hell of a lot of fun. The proceedings in MEGALON aped the wild and bombastic flavor of the pop culture currents of the period. The early '70s in Japan were a rife with monsters and superheroes of every shape and size permeating the whole country with *kaiju* madness. It must've been a grand time, with the Japanese economy exploding, the country mostly recovered from the war, and Japanese products proliferating world markets. In its own way, MEGALON reflects the fun and optimism of this period—a window into those carefree years just before the worldwide energy crisis brought everything to a pessimistic halt.

While some are quick to point out that MEGALON sold fewer box office tickets than the previous entries in Japan, it also saw one of the most limited releases, since it was the anchor of a children's matinee package, although it was a huge hit during a nationwide roadshow release in the US three years later. But still, for all of its childish histrionics, which are generally connoying to grownups, MEGALON indeed strikes a cord in youngsters (I can still hear the almost deafening cheers that filled the Coliseum Theater back in 1976; an adolescent cacophony so loud you couldn't scarcely hear the soundtrack) — the movie's intended audience — and who's going to argue with that?

Plus, you'd have to go through Jet Jaguar to do it. 🦖

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"Okay, which one of you is the piñata this time?"



"He's not heavy, he's my Gigan."



Godzilla said knock you out! I'm gonna knock you out!



# IRON KING:

## COOKING UP ACTION IN THE '70s

by M.G. Keller

**Q**uestion: What's more unconventional than unconventional?

**A**nswer: Subverting formula staples within an already off-kilter genre. In 1972, this is exactly what Nippon Gendai and Senkosha did with the premiere of *IRON KING*. The show belonged to a sub genre within a sub genre: the *tokusatsu* trope of giant-metallic-superhero-fighting-giant-monsters that began in 1966 with the one-two punch of Tsuburaya Productions' *ULTRAMAN* and P-Productions' *THE SPACE GIANTS* (*Mogumô Taihō*). For the following six years, sequel series and imitations filled *terebi* screens across Japan, and by the time *IRON KING* arrived people thought they knew what to expect. Boy, were they in for a surprise.

These programs always featured a young, handsome lead actor—the hero of the series. This protagonist would invariably be connected with the giant superhero in some way, whether actually transforming into it, or if the “superhero” happened to be a giant robot, piloting it from its cockpit. The heroic lead of *IRON KING* was Gentaro Shizuka, played by pop idol Shoji Ishibashi as a cocky, wisecracking, guitar-strumming, ass-kicking ladies' man. Despite being the show's alleged focal point, Gentaro *does not* transform into the gargantuan monster-fighting cyborg known as Iron King. Instead, the superhero's alter ego is that of goofy, bumbling sidekick Goro Kirishima, played by comedic actor Mitsuo Hamada. So unsuspecting is this realignment of roles that the first time Goro is actually observed becoming Iron King (in the first episode's second half), it's as much a shock to the adults in the audience as the children. It was, in fact, a shock to Ishibashi and Hamada themselves. “I was disappointed that I wasn't going to be the one transforming,” Ishibashi recalled in a 2001 interview. “I was sort of confused, being a transforming hero,” Hamada stated in a similar interview. “I started wondering, ‘How should I transform? How can I make myself appear cooler?’”

But the messing with expectations didn't stop there. It was naturally assumed that whatever monster threat happened to be causing havoc that week would have its lights punched out by the giant superhero. Yet, half the time, it was *not* Iron King who killed the monster. He merely battled it to a standstill; then Gentaro

finished the beast with his belt (no, really, his belt—it was an *Iron Belt*, but still) and sometimes with a pocket whip/sword, grenades, or improvisation. For villains, the audience had come to expect the “big bad” of these series to be some type of alien threat or lost civilization/empire from the center the earth or the bottom of the ocean. In *IRON KING*, we didn't see any aliens until the final third of the show. For most of the program, Gentaro and Goro had to deal with the Shiranui Clan and the Phantom Militia, the last remnants of the original tribes of Japan dispersed by the rise of the Yamato clan 2,000 years ago. Casting these groups in the role of villains proved somewhat controversial (imagine if a similar show in the United States had done the same with Native Americans), as well as confusing to the children in the audience. Children could understand an alien invasion, whereas the socio-political ramifications of a displaced demographic were a little much to get their small heads around. The producers also realized this, which is why the evil “Titaniens,” extraterrestrials that looked like a cross between zoot-suiters and the masked guy from Laura Branigan's “Self Control” video, were brought in at the end to deal out the evil mischief.

The show was ultimately divided into three acts, each one centered on a separate antagonist: the aforementioned Shiranui, the Phantom Militia, and the Titaniens. When one act changed over, the new villains always introduced themselves at the end of the episode, right after the previous group had been dealt with, usually showing off all of their menagerie of giant monster menaces at once, before politely releasing them one at a time in the episodes to follow (for the Shiranui, this was done in the first episode). When it came to monsters, here again was a bit of unorthodoxy: the Shiranui Clan and The Phantom Militia strictly used giant robots (perhaps taking their cue from Tatsunoko's anime series *NINJA SCIENCE TEAM GATCHAMAN*, which had premiered earlier that same year). The Shiranui's robots looked like robots; the Phantom Militia's robots looked like... dinosaurs. Not the sort of dino-robots you would expect to see in *POWER RANGERS* or *ZOIDS*, but robots made up to look like flesh and blood animals



(including a rare example of a suitmation sauropod). When the Titanians showed up, we finally got some genuine organic critters: giant insects that the Titanians themselves transformed into.

Although the show's giant monsters may not have been up to the same standards as, say, the exquisitely designed rogue's gallery of Tsuburaya Productions or Toci's design team in the 1960s, art director Noriyoshi Ikeya and monster-maker Ryosaku Takayama managed to make a few uniquely interesting creations. The Shiranui's robots recalled designs seen in contemporary anime of the period, and the best of the dinosaur robots of The Phantom Militia, compared favorably with the monsters of THE SPACE GIANTS. Not so well realized were the giant Titanian insects—often lacking in significant design, not very sculpted, and not very inspired. But it wasn't the monsters that set IRON KING apart from the crowd. The humor, tone and unconventionality of IRON KING were the aspects of the show that have kept it well loved among vintage tokusatsu aficionados to this very day.

The first and last act of IRON KING had female leads in the cast, leaving the middle section to be something of a men's club. For the Shiranui saga, we had Yukiko, played by Chieko Morikawa, who made her tokusatsu debut in the early episodes of KAMEN RIDER. The character turned out to be a femme fatale—a double agent who was secretly working for the Shiranui Clan, but had a change of heart all too late. For the Titanian saga, a different sort of character altogether was Noriko Fujimori (whom Gentaro and Goro liked to refer to as "Tenko"), played by Chiaki Ukyo. Noriko was a hard-lined officer, who took none-too-well to the goofy shenanigans of her male counterparts, and who found herself constantly harassed by their teasing (in a manner that would surely cause a few lawsuits in this day, age, and country—kids, *don't try this at home*).

So who was responsible for all this insanity? Mamoru Sasaki (1936-2006), a screen and television writer who had previously written for Tsuburaya's Ultra Series as well collaborating with Japanese new wave filmmaker Nagisa Oshima. His main inspiration for IRON KING came from the older Senkosha television series THE SAMURAI (*Onmitsu Kenshi*, 1964-1966) that featured, much like IRON KING, a handsome young hero and his bumbling sidekick. The names of the two main characters in IRON KING, Gentaro Shizuka and Goro Kirishima, are directly inspired by names of

**OPPOSITE: Iron King puts the clutch on Gyrogess!**  
**THIS PAGE (top to bottom): "You bug me, Kirigiren!"; Iron King: Super badass Gentaro Shizuka!**





their counterparts in *THE SAMURAI*: Shintaro Akikusa and Kiri-no Tonbei. Sasaki had already utilized Shoji Ishibashi in the series *SMASHING YOUTH!* (*Uchikome! Seishun*, 1971) and *WE'RE ALL FISH* (*Kimitachi-wa Sakana da!*, 1972), and it was Sasaki's very presence that convinced Ishibashi, who had been having doubts about appearing in an ostensibly children's program, to join the cast. "If all the episodes are written by you, Mr. Sasaki, I'll do it," he later recalled saying. "I think that all of the actors enjoyed working with Mr. Sasaki. I was really into his creativity—it didn't matter what kind of storylines they were, I really wanted to work with him. So, I guess that when he asked me about starring in *IRON KING*, I had no choice but to say, 'Yes!'" Mitsuo Hamada also recalled, "[Sasaki] had a great rapport with Mr. Ishibashi, who was an ideal choice for a cool-type hero character."

The humor and bizarre escapades of *IRON KING* took several forms. In addition to the inherent goofiness of Goro's character, it was decided that Iron King would be fueled by hydrogen oxide, and after fighting a monster, Goro would be portrayed as parched and thirsting for as much water as he could drink. Despite this obvious clue, his counterparts were unaware as to his true identity for the majority of the show's run. Sometimes the weirdness was a bit too much even within the confines of the show, such as when a hundred or so children's helium balloons proved sufficient enough to lift a 50-meter monster into the air.

But it wasn't all fun and games. *IRON KING* was heavy on action, and sometimes things got a little too exciting for the cast members. Hamada recalled one such incident: "The most striking was when we decided to have Yukiko catch on fire. Even though she was wearing a fire-retardant jacket, for some reason, her costume underneath the jacket caught fire. Chieko Morikawa, who played Yukiko, was scared out of her wits and grabbed me. While I tried to put out the fire, she was holding on to me so tight that I couldn't do a damned thing. Then, my clothes caught on fire, too! It was the assistant director who finally saved us... the reason why Yukiko died in the story shortly after the incident (she was originally intended to stay for the entire show) was because Chieko said, 'I've had enough!'"

One thing *tokusatsu* fans cannot get enough of is vintage Japanese martial arts action, monster mashing, and outlandish entertainment. To those who have a thirst for such things and have not yet discovered the joys of *IRON KING*, all 26 English Subtitled episodes are currently available in a complete DVD set from Mill Creek, which should do more to quench their hydro-powered circuits than any river not yet lapped up into Goro's waiting gullet. 🐉

M.G. (Mike) Keller, designer and writer for *MONSTER ATTACK TEAM*, lives on the outskirts of Dallas, TX with three reptiles, a lot of bills, and a little bit of angst.

**TOP:** Goro and Gentaro go into action!  
**MIDDLE:** Iron King tangles with Gyrogeist!  
**BOTTOM:** Iron King gives Vacuumirror a cybernetic shitsu from hell!





**FORGED IN HEROIC IRON!**

# THE SUPER ROBOT RED BARON

**PROVES ITS METTLE!**

by David E. Chapple

Famous flyer Manfred Van Richthofen of WWI was a *freiherr*, a baron, who flew a tri-winged fighter plane and was an ace of the German air force. Because of the bright red color of his plane, he came to be known as the Red Baron. Another reading of the term *freiherr* translates to "free man". Both of these readings apply to the namesake character of Senkosha and Nippon Television's influential and phenomenal *tokusatsu* series **SUPER ROBOT: RED BARON** (1973). If you grew up watching **JOHNNY SOKKO AND HIS FLYING ROBOT**, this is the next evolution of the concept, steeped in the then-emerging popularity of animated series such as **MAZINGER Z** (1972) and live-action series such as **ULTRAMAN ACE** (1972).

Although a fun and very entertaining series on a surface level, this tightly written show would prove that an examination of its deeper meanings are justified. Not just your typical robot versus robot or monsters show, the series was also ingenious in that it dealt with philosophical issues of its premise, making for a fully enveloping and exhilarating experience for the whole family. Reading into the deeper meanings of the word *freiherr* is precisely what the show does in of itself. It has ripples of deeper meanings such as man's place in the universe against the emergence of technology and its inherent ramifications therein; and, like the Red Baron of real life, the meaning of what is man and what is machine and how they collaborate, combine, and work together.

Throughout the show, much as in piloting of the namesake plane—a high-tech marvel Richthofen banded better than anyone—the pilot of Super Robot Red Baron, Ken Kurenai (Yosuke Okada) and his father Kentaro (Makoto Takagiri) ultimately

comes to realize that it is not the technology (the machine) that is important, but the person who controls it. Ultimately, the theme of the show becomes the question of who is in control: Man or Machine? Who is the puppet, and who is the puppet master? Can a robot become a man, and can a man become a robot? What does it mean to be a free man? And what happens when you make a deal with the devil (or, in this case, Devil)?

Straight from the opening rhythmic heartbeat sounds of the main title music, reminiscent of the beating of a human heart or the percussive beat of an ignition-timing gun, both themes of man and machine are heard. This turns into a funky heroic music theme sung by famed Japanese singer Kotaro Asa (aka Leiji Asa) and composed by the renowned Tadao Inoue (aka Daisuke Inoue) of Blue Comets fame, amidst a montage of iron works forging the parts that will become the title robot, followed by scenes depicting the various human characters of the show in a fighting sequence that serves not only to show their unique character identities but also their

various fighting abilities. And finally, of course, emerges our heroic automaton of Baronium steel.

The opening episode, "Conspiracy of the Robot Empire", reveals that in the near future, several nations have gathered at the World Robot Expo held in Tokyo to show off each nation's own giant robot. Almost immediately the robots are stolen by the evil Iron Alliance, led by Dr. Deviler (Hiroshi Ikaida), a former robotics engineer who wants to use the stolen robots along with his humanoid robot army to take over Earth and enslave humanity. Following in his late father's footsteps, Kenichiro Kurenai (Nobuyuki Ishida) has prepared for this eventuality and built a giant robot, Red Baron, so that his younger brother Ken can protect mankind. Unveiling the namesake robot to Ken ("Kureinai" means "Crimson" or "Deep Red" in Japanese), Kenichiro has his brother imprint his own voice and fingerprints into the Red Baron's systems to ensure that only he can pilot the super robot.

Soon afterwards Kenichiro is killed, leaving Ken, now an orphan



(his mother, father, and younger brother were presumed dead years before, murdered by the Iron Alliance), with the sole responsibility of Red Baron. As a member of the SSI (Secret Science Investigation), whose mission is to stop all threats to humanity and peace, he and Red Baron are on the forefront of the battle against the Robot Empire. He is joined by the other five members of the SSI, all filling essential archetypal roles. Captain Minoru Daigo (Tetsuya Oshita), the no-nonsense, stoic leader known as "Boss Daigo"; Tetsuya Sakai (Hisashi Kato), the man of action; Daisuke Hori (Pepe Hozumi), the main comic relief; Mari Matsubara (Rei Maki), the lone female agent; and Police Inspector Ippai Kumano (Isao Tamagawa), an unofficial member of the group who on the surface seems like a second comic relief character—patrolling on a bicycle in a Clouseau trenchcoat and getting a flat tire almost every episode—but turns out to be a formidable opponent, especially with the umbrella that never leaves his side.

Throughout every episode, the shadowy Dr. Devil uses one of his stolen and retrofitted robots to destroy and terrorize the Japanese citizenry, but the robot inevitably goes up against the Red Baron, who is called from the underground facilities of the Kurenai Robotics Laboratories (out of a sliding swimming pool similar to Thunderbird 1 in Gerry Anderson's *THUNDERBIRDS*) by Ken, who leaps into the pilot seat and pulls the Fight Lever, enabling him to take on the Iron Alliance's automations. Red Baron has various arsenals at the ready, including the Baron Punch, missiles launched from its chest, and the devastating finishing weapon Elec-Trigger, a beam weapon fired simultaneously from his "ears"—often with explosive results. Meanwhile, the SSI team usually fights on a second front against the black clad humanoid army of Devil on the ground in well-choreographed fight scenes that crackle with energy. Interestingly, both Devil and the SSI also have underground bases; Devil's base is under the ocean, while the SSI has their base underneath a mechanic's garage.

One of the standout episodes, "The Beautiful Assassin" (Episode 11), has Devil injecting a "Bloodtron" into Mari's bloodstream so he can control her and make her kill Ken. In a harrowing scene at a birthday party, Mari goes after Ken with a dagger, and in slow motion slashes him in the chest. Surprisingly for a children's



**TOP: Red Baron squares off with Mau-Mau ABOVE: Goryu's electrifying queue attack.**

program, blood sprays from Ken's wound like something out of a Sonny Chiba film. This scene and Rei's stunning performance of a woman possessed are truly horrifying to watch. Adults are not unique to the evil brainwashing by the Iron Alliance, as illustrated in "The Treacherous Cosmic Express" (Episode 34), when children

usually in the Inspector's care are kidnapped and electronically brainwashed by Devil's army. That doesn't mean that there aren't other standout episodes: "The Foretold Trap" (Episode 15) finds the SSI on a shoot-on-sight manhunt for Ken, who has been framed by the Iron Alliance for a murder he didn't commit.

Originally contracted for 26 episodes, and premiering on Nippon Television (NTV) at 7:00pm on Thursday, July 4, 1973, the show met with success early on, crushed its competition in the ratings, and was given the green light for an additional 13 episodes during mid-production (for a total of 39), then another 13 after that (for a total of 52). But the main sponsor went belly up, forcing the series to wrap at 39 episodes. Since the original story, as conceived, was to climax with the 26<sup>th</sup> episode, the producers had to come up with a new convention to continue the narrative and move the dovetail climax to the 39<sup>th</sup>. Unfortunately, two of the supporting cast members were only contracted for the first 26 episodes, and had to be dramatically written-out of the show. Therefore, by episode 25, viewers noticed a change as the scope of the Iron Alliance was revealed not just to be a worldwide organization but a solar system wide organization called the "Space Iron Alliance" with its main base on Mars, and Dr. Devil was revealed not to be the puppet master, but rather one of their puppets in charge of the Earth mission.

Ironically, in this meant the scope of the show expanded, the core of the show (Ken's family) was brought more into focus and back to home. In the first episode of the three-part finale, Episode 37 "Father's Letter From Across Space", Ken receives a missive from his presumed dead father. The letter reveals that he is

being held prisoner on the Iron Alliance base on Mars, forced to make robots for the evil empire, and he begs Ken to come with Red Baron to help him. The trip is one-way, however, and Ken finds his father on the red planet living in luxury and ordering his minions around, killing those who disobey him without emotion or remorse. He is acting as detached as the machines. It turns out that he is actually the leader of the Iron Alliance, brought back to life by the alien Giras Q (vocalized by Eisuke Yoda) and given mechanical immortality via an artificial heart powered by clockwork mechanisms. One thing comes to the forefront: what does it mean to rely on technology to live, and what does it mean to live if you are just existing, as Ken's father is? When does relying on technology become being controlled by it? Artificial Immortality versus Mortal Life.

After a battle where his father's choice threatens to annihilate the Earth, Ken's father has a change of "heart" and decides that life and freedom are more important than immortality—a signature of writer Shozo Uehara, who was also one of the main writers on Tsuburaya Productions' ULTRA SEVEN (1967). Throughout the final two episodes, this theme is explored visually with the unique camera compositions and dramatic lighting—the work of director Kiyoshi Suzuki, who cut his teeth as a director of photography for Tsuburaya Productions. In one scene, only

the top quarter of the frame is the human characters of the SSI, while the bottom three quarters is overwhelmed by technology or machinery. In the final scene of the last episode, this visual is reversed, by placing the SSI members (representing humanity) in the bottom quarter of the frame, while the upper three quarters is dominated by Mt. Fuji (nature), while the SSI and Ken's father have a traditional Japanese picnic and tea ceremony.

In the end, with Kentaro's mechanical heart failing, Ken takes his father into the cockpit of Red Baron. After 39 episodes of trying to destroy the super robot, he will finally sit in the pilot seat and take control of the technology himself. Unfortunately, he passes away before reaching the robot, but Ken takes him there anyway. Having been an example of human as slave to technology—as was Giras Q and Devil's goal—Kentaro rejects this life and chooses freedom to make his own choices. Inspector Kumano verbalizes this with his final line: "Dr. Kurenai didn't want to depend on a machine to live. He chose to refuse a clockwork tomorrow."

Although this brief look at the show has only scratched the surface, looking below the surface is what the show is all about. SUPER ROBOT: RED BARON is a wonderful *tokusatsu* show from the most productive year of the "Henshin Boom" that swept Japan in the mid-'70s. It works on several levels while looking seemingly simple on the surface. Seven months after the final episode of RED BARON, the same team followed up with SUPER ROBOT: MACH BARON (1974), and then three years later with the last of the Baron Series, LIL' SUPERMAN: GANBARON (1977), each of which have their own merits, but are not directly connected to the original series, which is a benchmark of the genre. SUPER ROBOT: RED BARON is available on DVD in the US from Mill Creek, in the original Japanese with English Subtitles (since the series was never imported, it was not dubbed for English-speaking audiences), so you can all witness for yourselves the heroic mettle of the *Crimson Freiherr!*



ABOVE: Assaulted by Donquix-1 and Spider-Robot.

David E. Chapple is a writer living in Southern California who was involved in the production of the TV Asahi Sci-Fi series CHRONO POLICE WECKER: D-02 (*Jiku Keisatsu Wokka D-02*, 2002).



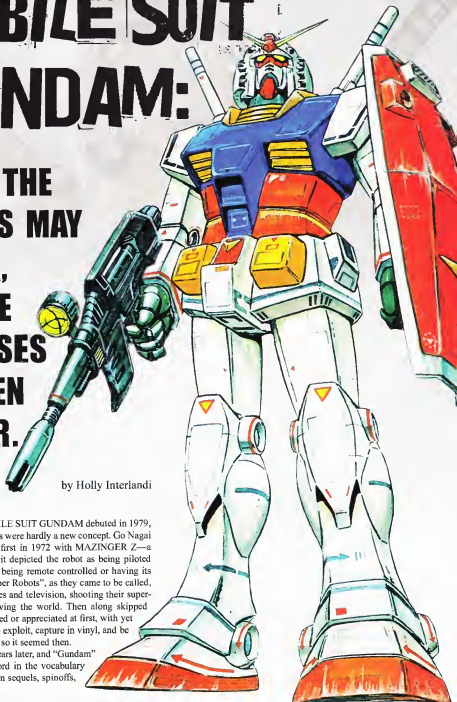
# MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM:

WHERE THE  
ROBOTS MAY  
BE BIG,  
BUT THE  
NEUROSES  
ARE EVEN  
BIGGER.

by Holly Interlandi

When the first MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM debuted in 1979, piloted giant robots were hardly a new concept. Go Nagai arguably introduced the first in 1972 with MAZINGER Z—a significant step because it depicted the robot as being piloted from within, rather than being remote controlled or having its own consciousness. “Super Robots”, as they came to be called, were soon all over movies and television, shooting their super-lasers and heroically saving the world. Then along skipped GUNDAM, hardly noticed or appreciated at first, with yet another breed of robot to exploit, capture in vinyl, and be forgotten a year later. Or so it seemed then.

This is now, over 30 years later, and “Gundam” is still a well-known word in the vocabulary of nerds. There have been sequels, spinoffs,



films, comics, and everything conceivable that a successful franchise might produce, including, yes, the requisite vinyl toys and model kits. How could such an initially untrumpeted anime series come slogging through the back door of television and end up becoming a brand empire the size of *Pokemon*?

Let's think about what we love about giant robots. *Voltron*. *Transformers*. *Mechagodzilla*. *ZOIDS*. They're *goofy*, right? Especially when the giant robots are paired with their principal foes, giant monsters. In the upcoming *PACIFIC RIM*, Jaegers are created to combat giant aliens from another dimension. *ROBOTECH* coins its term and its technology from extraterrestrials. *Tokusatsu* series revel in ridiculous-looking aliens and over-dramatic villains trying to dominate the earth. It's fun for the whole family. Rubber suits! Crazy fight moves! And an emotional center more removed than a military base in northern Greenland. By 1979, this was the norm.

So what made GUNDAM different? What makes Gundam GUNDAM?

Giant robots, sure. A unique mecha

design, sure. A roster of intriguing characters, absolutely.

But what separates Gundam from almost every other existing series featuring giant robots is its *humanity*—its glaring psychological realism. In every Gundam series, the people who pilot the robots are just that—*people*—and as history has shown us, people crave power, join factions, fight wars, and perhaps most significantly, kill other people, often in the name of justice and victory.

The common thread between a lot of giant robot shows is that the focus is entirely on the robot itself: design, battle capability, origin. What makes Gundam GUNDAM is that the Gundam robots, called “mobile suits”, are nothing more than extremely capable weapons of war. Every mobile suit has to have a human at the helm. The characters that populate the Gundam timelines are fighting against each other, not against monsters or faceless forces of evil, and this gives the series an emotional immediacy as well as a psychological structure that results in a vast maturity in storytelling barely touched

by most giant robot series. It's also part of the reason that the original *MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM* (often referred to by fans as “First Gundam”) did not appeal to children, and as a result, the ratings suffered. It took several years for potential audiences to understand that despite the presence of giant robots, this was patently a story for adults.

In short, GUNDAM is hard Sci-Fi, not your usual rubbery, intergalactic, technicolored space-creature romp.

Gundam creator Yoshiyuki Tomino approached the series in a different way than many of his peers approached their robot stories. His inspiration for GUNDAM came primarily from literary greats such as Arthur C. Clarke and Robert Heinlein, as Tomino's vision was to create a sprawling science fiction epic with fully-realized characters and complex conflicts—not to just sell toys or entertain easily-bored audiences with a single catch phrase. He looked to actual scientific theory, such as Gerard K. O'Neill's books about orbiting space colonies, to great the world of *MS GUNDAM*. Thus, the franchise involves nothing whatsoever about “magical”



ABOVE: The five principal Gundams of WING are (l-r) Shenlong, Sandrock, Wing, Deathscythe, and Heavyarms.



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: AFTER WAR GUNDAM X (1996); Two images from MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM 00 (2007); MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM (1979).**

properties, mystical aliens, or inexplicably powerful fight moves; the majority of Gundam technology is, while far-fetched, nevertheless a product of human hands.

In creating this universe, Tomino came to think of giant robots as more than singular personalities. After all, if humanity has the technology to construct one robot, wouldn't mass production of them eventually follow? Conflict naturally leads to arms races, and in Gundam, there are existing mobile suits (such as "Zakus" in First

Gundam) whose continuing technological development finally culminates with the Earth Federation's prototype of Mobile Suit Gundam—a specifically advanced type of mobile suit designed for pilots with special capabilities. These Gundams are nearly indestructible, highly maneuverable, and in some rare cases, seem to have a strange element of intelligence.

Thus, in the world of GUNDAM, mobile suits (no Gundam fan calls them robots) are the principal instruments of intimidation

and warfare, while a "Gundam" is a particular type of advanced mobile suit. Gundams, however, exist in a world where everyone not driving a Gundam is almost always still driving a mobile suit, which has become the most basic unit of combat—be it airborne, sea-capable, or manufactured for space. This might seem similar to the historical difference between the infantry and the cavalry. Those operating a Gundam are truly on their "high horse". The Gundams represent a new generation



**TOP: GUNDAM SEED (2002)'s primary rivalry focuses on Kira Yamoto (left) and Athrun Zala (right).  
BOTTOM: Char Aznable in First GUNDAM.**

of mobile suit warfare, while the main characters—often no older than fifteen or sixteen, and referred to as “kids”—represent a new generation of soldiers.

Even through its many variations over the years, the narrative premise has stayed much the same. In a not-so-distant future, overpopulation and pollution of the Earth has given rise to man-made space colonies—affectionately referred to as “giant tin cans”—that spin like satellites in orbit around the Earth. (Due to their

relatively small size, looking “into the sky” on a space colony only results in the view of a curved, endless series of communities, locked in place by centrifugal force.) The shows always take place during a time of military upheaval, usually between the domineering forces of Earth and rebellious space colony factions.

Each new Gundam series seems to have a different spin on this world—the only constants being the space colonies and the mobile suits (although certain

themes are also a constant—for example, the inevitable presence of a mysterious a character in a mask who has left his former life behind). In an effort to reach out to newer fanbases, Gundam has introduced many different scenarios and sets of characters over the years, each of which makes a different use of its principal mecha and political significance: MOBILE SUIT ZETA GUNDAM, a harrowing, bleak successor to the events in the original series; MOBILE FIGHTER G GUNDAM, in which



**The cast of MOBILE SUIT ZETA GUNDAM (1985).**

the Gundams are used as instruments of a quadrennial tournament to determine the ruler of the colony sphere; **NEW MOBILE REPORT GUNDAM WING**, an alternate universe series in which the colonies create their own Gundams as symbols of revolution; **MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM SEED**, a struggle between genetically enhanced "Coordinators" and traditional humans called "Naturals"; and many, many more.

**GUNDAM's** detailed and complex world view eventually made people sit up and take notice, though it took several years (the original series was canceled prematurely after 43 episodes). When the television episodes were recut and rereleased into a series of movies and released in 1981, they did very well, and set the stage for the many sequels and spinoffs. In a similar case, **SPACE BATTLESHIP**

**YAMATO** also failed to appeal to a wider audience upon first showing, but saw a vast increase in popularity after the airing of reruns and major motion pictures. Its extremely realistic depictions of a future world probably appeared dull in comparison to colorful Super Robot series. One might say that no one watches science fiction to be reminded of the real world's drudgery—except when it reveals things about ourselves that might seem trite or obvious when set in the ordinary world. This is where shows like **YAMATO** and **GUNDAM** step in.

The tradition of every Gundam series is to examine both the individual and political ramifications of military combat. This requires an expanded world view, complete with multiple opponents, various vantage points, and a reluctance to deem any one character or organization the force of "absolute" evil. "Back in 1979, a typical giant robot anime did not require too many details in its worldbuilding," writes anime critic Ryusuke Hikawa in *A Matured Gundam Saga*. "It was quite sufficient to have military bases and civilian areas for each side that turned into battlefields. In contrast, First Gundam submitted that people necessarily belonged to abstract immensities, to society and the world, and that macroscopic entities called states perpetrated the calamity of war, within which clashes between robots occurred as a conflict of arms."

This brings us to another major theme of **GUNDAM**: the cost of battle. In every series, collateral damage wrings paths out of soldiers, causes politicians to change their tactics, and in some cases, directly affects the direction of the plot. Although it may seem obvious, characters die in **GUNDAM**, often brutally. "Plain death, beyond good and evil, right and wrong, as inevitable phenomena in war, is ubiquitously depicted and sets the tone of the story," Hikawa writes. And this principle applies to death on both large and small scales. In **First GUNDAM**, the Principality of Zeon obliterates entire colonies during war and even drops empty colony cylinders onto the surface of the Earth itself, killing huge amounts of the population at a time. In **ZETA**, the main character Kamille watches his mother get sucked into space and die—an event that causes another Lieutenant to defect to the opposite side. In **WING**, the single death of the pilot Quatre's father destroys his own

mind enough that he uses the Wing Zero Gundam to blow away a whole colony—metal and all.

In contrast, when Godzilla or Mechagodzilla destroys an office building, no member of the audience is worrying about the agonizing death of the salary man in Cubicle 4. GUNDAM invites you to *contemplate* these deaths—to discuss what the best thing to do in a battle might be, and decide if the sacrifice is ultimately worth the reward. For this reason, Gundam displays the philosophy that “good guys” and “bad guys” don’t really exist—there are just different sides to the same war. No default viewpoint dominates another. Director Yasuhiro Imamura of G GUNDAM explicitly admitted to changing the storyline to avoid certain characters being viewed as villains. All humans are equally capable of losing mental control, fearing their own capabilities, and learning from the change.

Take the story of Heero, the main character in WING. Over the course of the series’ 49 episodes, he progresses through the kind of character arc that might be associated with live action war dramas. Raised to be a Gundam pilot and assassin, he cannot really communicate or feel much empathy for other people—setting up his story as one of learning to understand emotions as well as eliminate hostile targets. It’s been joked that everyone in WING cracks up

psychologically at least once before the end of the series—establishing commentary on how military violence negatively affects even those who sign up to participate in it.

This is not to say that GUNDAM is completely devoid of epic and majestic robot battles unrelated to agonizing death or brain damage. Each Gundam series has its share of crowd-pleasing action moments. Upon first running out of ammo while piloting the RX-78 Gundam, Amuro Ray discovers that his mobile suit is hefty enough to simply grab his opponent by the faceplate and shake him back and forth like a puppet. Epyon, a Gundam model introduced in the latter half of the WING series, sports a thermal whip that it uses to slash ships apart like some massive, metal-encased Indiana Jones. Many Gundams feature laser swords resembling lightsabers, or in some cases, giant scythes. And in *ENDLESS WALTZ*, the initial retrieval and unveiling of Wing Custom with its elegant enhancements is exciting enough to warrant cheering.

Recently, the most exciting thing to come out of Gundam has been the reimagining of the first Mobile Suit Gundam series as a comic book—now gorgeously translated into English and published by Vertical Publishing, who are responsible for bringing a great deal of high-quality Japanese comics to the US. There have been plenty of Gundam comic book tie-ins in

the past, but in this case, to have Yoshikazu Yasuhiko—the original character designer and visual director of the show—acting as artist in a project translating Yoshiyuki Tomino’s unique vision to the manga page is thrilling, to say the least. And Vertical have done an incredible job.

In one of the accompanying essays, Hideaki Anno—most well-known for his work on NEON GENESIS EVANGELION—writes, “I’m afraid the legacy of GUNDAM dwindled down to the mobile suits, in the form of plastic models as a business and military hobbyism. I find it unfortunate that the Tale that enveloped the worldview and ideas on war presented in First Gundam ceased to function as anything more than a device for the mobile suit fantasy... [With the release of this manga], I want as many people as possible to reconfirm and savor the essence and allure of Tales.”

Model collectors and toy enthusiasts are, of course, a part of Gundam’s audience, and each Gundam machine’s distinct characteristics certainly allowed people to identify with its unique properties. However, the prime importance of Gundam lies in its storytelling—its stylistic depiction of humans fighting against their own psyches as valiantly as against a world that wants to destroy them. There are no monsters to fight, here. In the world of Gundam, the monsters are ourselves. **A**



ABOVE: Yoshikazu Yasuhiko's manga art for GUNDAM: THE ORIGIN.



# JUMBO MACHINDERS

## THE TRUE STORY OF THE SHOGUN WARRIORS

By TOM FRANCK

**2013** is a significant year for Japanese monsters and superheroes, both live action and animated, as it marks the 40th anniversary of a toy line that celebrated giant robots like no other—"Jumbo Machinders!"

December 1972 saw the premiere of Go Nagai's groundbreaking animated show MAZINGER Z. While giant robots had certainly been present in Japanese pop culture previously (Tetsujin 28, Giant Robo, etc.), MAZINGER Z introduced the idea of a piloted robot containing an arsenal of super weapons. Thus, the first "Super Robot" was born, and the show was a smash hit right out of the gate. Of course, toys based on the "Steel Fortress", as the robot was nicknamed, were an instant certainty.

Popy, a brand-new character division of Bandai Toys, was formed to exploit the then-new series such as KAMEN RIDER. Popy were on the ground floor in developing MAZINGER Z,



GREAT MAZINGER (1974)



IRONMAN No. 28 (1980)



KAMEN RIDER V3 (1973)

and a wide variety of ideas for toys were tossed around. One idea that gained steam was to glorify giant robots by making giant toys of them. Originally planned to be a whopping 100-centimeters tall, the toys were scaled down to a still-massive 60cm (24"). The first two entries, Mazinger Z and Kamen Rider V3 (a superhero from the series of the same name), did see 100cm prototypes built (a run of the Mazinger Z was offered as a magazine prize as well as a store display, while the 100cm tall Kamen Rider V3 was only released as a store display).

The major change from these first prototypes to the final product was the material in which they were cast. While the 100cm store displays were made out of vinyl, the 60cm Jumbo Machinder

toys were mostly made of parts roto-cast in polyethylene terephthalate (a thermoplastic polymer used to make food, beverage, and other liquid containers). The use of this material, combined with the size of the toys, resulted in Jumbo Machinders gaining the nickname "Giant Shampoo Bottles" in Japan.

Five toys of heroes from animated and live action shows were released in the Jumbo Machinder line in 1973: Mazinger Z, Kamen

Rider V3, Ultraman Taro, Super Robot: Red Baron, and Kamen Rider X. These were numbered from 1-5. To help sell the initial two figures, Popy produced slightly smaller vinyl store displays of villains for the heroic Jumbo Machinders to fight: Doubles M2 and Kingdan X-10 for Mazinger Z, and Turtle Bazooka and Scissors Jaguar for Kamen Rider V3. Eventually, interest in the villain store displays was high enough to turn them into products. These four



**GAIKING (1976)**

villains were released in brown cardboard boxes with simple two-color graphics. Later in the year, Popy released six more villains: four enemy robots of Mazinger Z (Spartan K5, Rokuron Q9, Gren Ghost C3, and Garada K7) and two more for Kamen Rider V3 (Cannon Buffalo and Lens Ant).

In the second year of release for Jumbo Machinders, the numbering system was dropped, and no new villains were produced. The toy line was successful and continued to grow year by year. Its artistic peak arguably occurred in 1976, when Popy released two gigantic toys: The



**GRENDIZER (1975)**

Spaizer—a flying saucer that housed the famous super robot Grendizer—and Daikumaryu, Gaiking's giant space dragon. These were two of the grandest, most deluxe toys ever made—both massive and filled with projectile-firing goodness. When looking at them today, one has to scratch their head over the fact that a toy company decided to mass-produce them.

As the Energy Crisis of the mid-70s took its toll in rising plastic prices, and paired with the rise in popularity of diecast combining robot-toys—from another Popy line known as “Chogokin” (Super Alloy; named after the fictional metal Mazinger Z was created from)—Jumbo Machinders saw gradually declining sales after

1976. In 1982, Popy was reabsorbed into its parent company, Bandai; and the Jumbo Machinder line was put on hiatus. A wooden prototype of a planned “Goggle Robo” (from the 1982 live action series GREATEST TASK FORCE: GOGGLE FIVE) was made, but never mass-produced. Today, this prototype can be seen in the Bandai Museum in Mibu, Tochigi Prefecture.

While the toy line was going strong in the '70s, the impact of Jumbo Machinders was not lost on companies other than Popy. Rival Japanese toymakers such as Nakajima Toys, Takara, Bullmark, Clover, and Takemi all made similar products. Although Bandai trademarked the name “Jumbo Machinder”,



**RED BARON (1971)**

these companies couldn't be stopped from producing big, projectile firing robot toys out of polyethylene—some of them even using the catchword “Jumbo” in their advertising.

Similarly, at this time, Japanese animation as a whole—super robots specifically—were successfully being exported to other countries around the world. Naturally, toys from these shows—including the Jumbo Machinders—were



**BATTLE FEVER ROBO (1979)**

appearing on toy store shelves across the globe. In 1977, the US toy giant Mattel launched “Shogun Warriors”, which modified and repackaged six Jumbo Machinders: Great Mazinga (Great Mazinger), Dragun (Getter Dragon), Raydeen (Brave Raideen), Daimos (Fighting General Daimos), Gaiking (Giant Space Dragon Gaiking) and Godzilla (made exclusively for the US market).

Toy enthusiasts in the US often make the mistake of viewing the overall toy line as consisting



GREAT MAZINGER (1974)

but did not make a Jumbo Machinder-sized toy of the character. One has to imagine that Nakajima planned a prototype, never produced it, and the head—or a sample of the head—somehow wound up at Ceppiratti.

Similarly, Ceppiratti released a Jumbo Machinder-sized toy of a Gundam (from 1979's *MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM*). While Clover had the initial Gundam toy rights, they never released a Jumbo-style Gundam, and they went under (forced out of business by Bandai) before Gundam exploded in popularity. Ceppiratti may have somehow gotten hold of a Clover prototype before Clover could



DIANOS (1978)

SUNVULCAN ROBO (1981)



GETTER-1 (1974)

release it. This Jumbo Gundam is extremely deluxe, with many parts and accessories, but only seems to exist in a few territories in Italy.

In 1990, the Jumbo Machinder resurfaced for a brief reprise. Bandai put the name on a large toy of Five Robo from *EARTH TASK FORCE: FIVEMAN*. This toy was battery operated, made of hard plastic, and slightly smaller than the original Machinders—but technically, must be considered

part of the line. An unofficial Jumbo Machinder, "Getter Robo Go" (from the animated series of the same title) was released by Yutaka (a subsidiary of Bandai specializing in budget toys) the following year. Made out of polyethylene, this one did have shooting parts, and therefore fits in well with the original Machinders.

The 1990s saw a resurgence in nostalgic character toys and new products based on these classics as well, and reissues of old toys became commonplace. In 1999, Uni-Five, another Bandai subsidiary (geared to the nostalgia market) reissued the Mazinger Z Jumbo Machinder in a line they called "Jumbo Machines." They followed suit with reissues of Great Mazinger, Gaiking, and a re-envisioned Garada



GETTER-2 (1974)



**GETTER DRAGON (1975)**

more classic approach to Jumbo Machinders with the 2010 release of the "Super Shogun Stormtrooper" from STAR WARS. The materials, gimmicks, and aesthetics of the originals were very well researched, and it is easily the most authentic modern-era Jumbo Machinder. Super 7 has announced that Boba Fett and Darth Vader have been slated as follow-ups.

As vintage toy collecting escalated in the 1990s, Jumbo Machinders were re-examined through the prism of collectability. It slowly became apparent that

K7—the latter of which was an entirely different sculpt.

In 1998, Bandai America released the Jumbo Astro Megazord as part of their Power Rangers line. Bandai America planned a companion piece, the Jumbo Mega Voyager, but it didn't go into production. They also canceled a Jumbo Quantasaurus Rex in 2001. A short time later, a subdivision of Bandai America, Bandai Creation, started their "Jumbo Megazord" line. These were full Machinder-sized toys in slightly more articulated poses than the originals, but cast in hard plastic as well as polyethylene.

In 2009, Bandai gave a fully modernized take on the toys with the Jumbo Machinder Neo line. The first and

only entry was Mazinger Z (based on the then-current animated remake), which was made out of hard plastic and vinyl, with far more modern accuracy in design and detail. Sadly, no other entries have been announced.

Back in the States, the indie toyshop Super 7, based in San Francisco, took a



**MACH BARON (1974)**



**GODMARS (1981)**



**BRAVE RAIDEEN (1975)**



**COM-BATTLER V (1976)**



the toy line was a perfect one for collecting. Emerging toy scholarship revealed that the line was even more expansive than people thought (for example, many Japanese natives who grew up in the 1970s didn't even know that villains were produced in the first year), and this sparked much interest in collecting. While Jumbos never had a cheap retail price, their real cost was in the amount of living space they occupied. Subsequently, they found their way into dumpsters at a higher rate than smaller toys. Moreover, because their boxes were made out of such flimsy cardboard, finding Mint-in-Box specimens is a greater challenge than normal.

Adult collectors also realized that Jumbo Machinders look really good lined up on a display shelf. While each one has a kind of opulent

**DANGUARD ACE (1977)**

charm not usually associated with a toy, *en masse* they are even more powerful and instantly the focus of any environment they are in. And because they are so difficult to acquire, Machinders are trophy-esque big game heads on a toy hunter's wall. The Machinder villains are exceptionally prized and are often viewed as status symbols. Most coveted of all is the Garada K7, with only three known specimens in the world.

Unlike many categories of toys, Jumbo Machinder collecting is not about reclaiming childhood. Adults are not simply going back reacquire the toys from their youth. When it comes to this particular category of toys, no one "had them all" as a kid. However, a vast majority of adults collecting them today did have at least one when they were children—either a Japanese original or some imported and repackaged Shogun Warriors version. And somehow, it was implied to kids that there were more Machinders out there.

And so, grown-up collectors of Jumbo Machinders have this overwhelming sense of

**DIANOS (1978)**



**RAIDEEN, DANGUARD ACE, AND COM-BATTER V WERE THE STARS OF MARVEL COMICS' "SHOGUN WARRIORS" (1979).**

simply continuing on a quest presented to them in childhood. And, because of the extreme scarcity of the top pieces, the continued unearthing of previously unknown examples from the four corners, and the exorbitant prices that a majority of entries in the line are currently commanding, it's a quest that no one has yet achieved—much like the never-ending battles of their namesake super robots. 🤖

*Tom Franck is a Japanese toy collector and enthusiast who lives in Los Angeles. He was featured as an appraiser on COLLECTION INTERVENTION on the Syfy Network.*

# WOLFMAN VS. GODZILLA:

## THE EPIC BATTLE YOU'VE NEVER SEEN!

An Interview with Independent Film Director Shizuo Nakajima

by Mark Jaramillo

Translated by Yoichi Kakuma and Tetsu Shiota

In his almost sixty years of battling gargantuan foes, the King of the Monsters has faced off against many creatures—from giant insects to three-headed dragons to Kong himself. However, an unexpected opponent appeared in an independent film shot thirty years ago in Japan. This is the story of that rarely-seen movie that even many hardcore Godzilla fans have no idea exists: **WOLFMAN VS. GODZILLA!**

Godzilla battling a werewolf? The very idea sounds preposterous. But what if the werewolf could grow to the size of Godzilla? That idea was conceived in the mind of Japanese filmmaker Shizuo Nakajima, who began his career as a production assistant for none other than Toho Studios in the early 1970s. While working on many of Toho's special effects films during this period, Mr. Nakajima learned the art of film production, honed his skills in special effects, and made many friends who were also fans of the genre. One of these friends was a young special effects assistant named Koichi Kawakita, who went on to be the effects supervisor of Toho's genre films of the 1990s. As a young man, Mr. Nakajima saw the initial theatrical runs of many classic Toho films, and was inspired by the visual artistry of the legendary Eiji Tsuburaya.

Another film that left an indelible impression on him was the Hammer Horror classic *THE CURSE OF THE WEREWOLF* (1961), starring Oliver Reed. Nakajima created a story in his mind that combined the genres of Japanese *kaiju eiga* (monster movies) and the classic Universal/Hammer monsters.

During his early years as a Toho employee, Nakajima and some friends made a few short films featuring homemade *kaiju* suits destroying meticulously constructed

sets. Although these were strictly amateur effects reels with no story, the young crew made them with a deep love for *kaiju*. The films were covered in many Japanese fanzines of the time, which encouraged Nakajima to fulfill his dream of making a full-length motion picture featuring the monsters that inspired him.

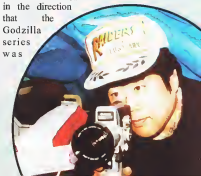
In 1983, Nakajima finished an actual story treatment and began preparations to shoot his own independent film, entitled **THE LEGENDARY COLOSSAL BEAST: WOLFMAN VS. GODZILLA** (*Dentetsu-no Kyoju Okami-Otoko tai Gajira*). For this labor of love, Nakajima was aided by many of his coworkers from Toho. Principal photography began in early 1984 on both special effects and drama sequences and wrapped in 1987. Work was done on weekends and sporadically as time allowed. Post-production slowly continues as of this writing, as Mr. Nakajima is a perfectionist and wants to make a movie that would make Eiji Tsuburaya proud.

Over the years, Nakajima has edited compilations of footage from the film for infrequent screenings at Japanese film festivals and science fiction conventions. The film is largely forgotten in its home country and virtually unknown everywhere else. After years of languishing in obscurity and having its very existence doubted, the film received new recognition when Nakajima provided me with stills and clips to be screened at the 2012 G-Fest—an annual *kaiju eiga* convention held in Chicago.

Over the past year, numerous interviews with the director have been conducted and heretofore-unknown details of the film have emerged. Many misconceptions and rumors about the film have been corrected, such as the running time, which was previously reported as five to ten minutes

(the finished film will be feature length). Additionally, it is widely believed that the film was never finished. The truth is that principal photography was completed years ago and post-production has continued very slowly over the past few decades. Nakajima took time from his schedule to talk to FM about his film

**Famous Monsters.** How did you become interested in filmmaking? Were any specific films influential in this decision? **Shizuo Nakajima.** I was and have always been a big fan of Toho's *kaiju eiga*. I was fascinated with the scenes created by Eiji Tsuburaya. I was especially influenced by **KING KONG VS GODZILLA** (1962) and **MOTHRA VS GODZILLA** (1964), both of which I actually saw in the movie theater when I was young. I loved that Godzilla was portrayed as an enemy and a threat to all humankind, but after **GHIDRAH, THE THREE HEADED MONSTER** (1964), Godzilla became a friend of mankind and looked pathetic to me. In **MONSTER ZERO** (1965), there is a scene in which Godzilla does the "Shie," a famous pose from the popular manga *Oso Matsu-kun*. When I saw this, I felt sad and couldn't help thinking that Godzilla was over. Even though I was disappointed in the direction that the Godzilla series was





headed, I still enjoyed films such as **FRANKENSTEIN CONQUERS THE WORLD** (1965) and **THE WAR OF THE GARGANTUAS** (1966).

It wasn't until after I entered University that I began to create my own independent films. During this time, I started to work on a part-time basis at Toho Studios. After I graduated, I became a full-time production assistant for Toho and worked on a number of films. I worked on most of the *tokusatsu* films after **GODZILLA'S REVENGE** (1969), as well as Akira Kurosawa's **DODES'KADEN** (1970) and **KAGEMUSHA** (1980).

**FM:** How did the concept of Godzilla fighting a Werewolf evolve?

**SN:** The idea was mine. Another film that I enjoyed immensely was **CURSE OF THE WEREWOLF**, so I soon started imagining that if such a creature were to grow to the size of a *daikaiju* (giant monster), he would be able to fight Godzilla. It was simply combining two of my cinematic interests. Beginning in 1972, friends of mine helped me make a few short films to test out our skills. We created a *Mosugoji* (Godzilla as he appeared in **MOTHR VS. GODZILLA**) costume along with other monsters using the same techniques and materials that Toho used to create the actual suits for their films. I purchased many of the materials used from the studio itself! One film was an early version of

**WOLFMAN VS. GODZILLA**. We also made a film in which the Wolfman fought the monster Bagon from **FRANKENSTEIN CONQUERS THE WORLD**.

**FM:** These early films sound amazing! Do you still have them in your possession?

**SN:** Probably in a box somewhere. Honestly, those films were just something my friends and I did to amuse ourselves in our spare time. I find it interesting that after 40 years, someone is asking me about them halfway around the world!

**FM:** So all of this paved the way for a new feature length production in the 1980s? That is very ambitious!

**SN:** Yes. Thanks to all of my work experience at Toho, I knew all about camera operation and how special effects worked. I felt we were ready to make a full movie. One of the biggest challenges I encountered was preparing a soundstage for the special effects shots. I knew the shooting would take a long time, so I converted my garage into a studio and constructed a Cyclorama (panoramic background). This was essential because in order to shoot the ideal night-view scene, we needed a specific color of blue that we could not achieve shooting outside with a plain sky background.

**FM:** How many people were involved in the production of the film?

**SN:** Once the production started, many people I had worked with wanted to be involved and came to help me. Needless to say, they were all crazy about *kaiju* films! There was a core crew of about 20 people, but there were also specialists in pyrotechnics, firearms, makeup, art design, and costuming. And in addition to the main actors, there were also extras. For the scenes in which the monsters attack the city, over 200 volunteers came to play the crowd running away in the streets. So, literally, hundreds of people were part of the production.

**FM:** One of the most impressive production values of the film is the detail and quality of the monster suits. Who was responsible for building them?

**SN:** The Wolfman costumes were created by my friend Fuyuki Shinada, who would go on to build many famous costumes such as Biollante (**GODZILLA VS. BIOLLANTE**) and Gamera's enemy monster, Legion (**GAMERA 2: THE ADVENT OF LEGION**). I was particular about the Godzilla suit, so I built it myself. I modeled it after the version featured in **KING KONG**





**OPPOSITE (left to right):** The full-blown Werewolf; Practical make-up effects created by the young special effects staff from Toho Studios. **THIS PAGE:** Amazing miniature set built by professionals on an amateur budget, in the director's garage! Based on the 1962 version, this Godzilla suit was fully constructed by director Nakajima himself!



**Director Nakajima's tribute is a remake of Ishiro Honda's KING KONG VS. GODZILLA (1962) crossed with Terence Fisher's CURSE OF THE WEREWOLF (1961).**

VS. GODZILLA. I did have an assistant to help with some of the more repetitive and mundane tasks, but the detail on the suit was the most time consuming. It's much easier to make a small sculpt, such as a figurine, because I can just make it on a table, allowing a good perspective for the entire balance of the sculpt.

But when it comes to making suits, it is an entirely different story. It's difficult to gauge the exact dimensions on such a large scale. Sometimes the head seemed too large, and other times it was too small. I personally must have spent hundreds of hours studying photographs of the actual movie suit and making countless modifications, especially to the face and head. It's much more complicated to try to make an exact reproduction rather than an original sculpt. I also had to consider installing all of the mechanical parts in the suit, as well as its durability, flexibility, and operability. All of these conditions must be fulfilled when we shoot. It was very hard to decide on which minor points I had to compromise.

**FM.** Once filming commenced, you must have been quite busy. What locations did you use for the exterior drama scenes?

**SN.** We obtained permission to film in some well-known locations such as Yamashita Park in Yokohama and Jiyugakka Station in Tokyo. We also filmed scenes in London, and on the international flight over to the UK.

**FM.** The sheer scope of this project never ceases to amaze, filming in so many public areas. Did any interesting situations arise?

**SN.** We had several incidents occur during filming, especially while we were shooting the scenes with the police and Self Defense Forces extras. Many people who saw the Self Defense Forces in the city without knowing a movie was being filmed became concerned and alerted the police. During the shooting of a scene where the troops were fighting back against the monsters,

we suddenly realized that there were many more police cars than we initially had as extras. The real police had come to investigate and asked if we had a filming permit!

**FM.** What were the differences between filming the special effects scenes and the drama scenes?

**SN.** Each had its own challenges. All of the special effects scenes are shot indoors so we can keep to our schedule rather easily. For the drama scenes, however, we must constantly make adjustments due to changes in weather and the actors' own schedules. When we shoot the special effects scenes, we need to be extra careful because we use gasoline and a lot of chemicals that are flammable and explosive, as well as titanium tetrachloride, which creates smoke.

**FM.** How long did it take to shoot all of the scenes?

**SN.** The drama scenes took about a year to film. The special effects were completed in almost three years. Since the completion of principal photography, I have been working on the post-production such as editing, post-scoring, music composition, telecine, and visual effects. It has taken such a long time because the staff can only work on this when they are off of their full-time jobs.

**FM.** How much was the budget for WOLFMAN VS. GODZILLA?

**SN.** Basically, all of the staff and cast were volunteering their talents, so there was no overhead cost there. I did always prepare food for everyone, though. So far, we have shot almost 400 rolls of Super 8mm film. We really ran through the film, especially when we shot the special effects scenes in high speed. Besides that, there were the costs involved for the optical printers, miniature sets, costumes, stage sets, props, and so forth. I estimate roughly that the film has cost over ¥10,000,000 (\$100,000; not adjusted for inflation).



**Two of the mightiest monsters meet for a duel to the death in this spectacular "amateur" film!**

**FM.** Have you had many occasions on which you had the opportunity to screen footage of the film for an audience?

**SN.** I have edited some trailers and shown them at various screenings of *tokusatsu* films as well as science fiction conventions in Japan.

**FM.** What has been the audience reaction to what they have seen of the film?

**SN.** In Japan, the audiences were pleasantly surprised and told me afterward that they wanted to see it when it is completed. The film has also been covered in some TV programs and magazines. Last year, I sent a compilation of clips to be shown at G-Fest in Chicago.

**FM.** At G-Fest, the footage of WOLFMAN VS. GODZILLA was provided at the last minute, so the event schedule was already printed out. However, once the organizers saw the clips, they generously made room on the full schedule for a presentation and screening. Flyers were quickly printed up to promote the presentation, and the attendees were only given five hours advance notice of the event. Amazingly, the room was overflowing with people! Although everyone there was a big Godzilla fan, the vast majority had never heard of the film. By the time the clips had ended, they were instant fans that wanted to see and learn more about the film!

**SN.** I'm very happy to hear that.

**FM.** How did your employers at Toho feel about you creating your own independent Godzilla film?

**SN.** From the beginning, I was well known at the studio as a huge fan of Godzilla. The art department had photographs of the Godzilla suit that I created. Toho even went as far to tell the *Nikkei Sangyo Shimbun* (Nikkei Business Daily), an industry newspaper,

about me; and they featured my work. Occasionally, I lent the Godzilla suit I made to Toho for *tokusatsu* events. Back then, the licensing was not as strict as nowadays, and they were more open and generous to amateur filmmakers.

**FM.** Your film is unique in that it is an independent production, but it uses the same techniques and skills learned by yourself and the crew while working on actual Toho films—it has a special place of importance in the history of *kaiju* films.

**SN.** Thank you! My friend Koichi Kawakita keeps telling me, "Hurry up and finish it! I'll have Toho release the video as a fan-made movie!" The entire point of this film was to recreate all my favorite scenes originated by Eiji Tsuburaya, whom I respect from the bottom of my heart. The entire ordeal has been challenging, yet exciting for me. For all who have shown interest and support, thank you very much!

It has been a long ordeal to track down information about this mysterious production, but ultimately, it was worth it. Thanks to August Ragone for separating the truth from the myth to set me on my path, and to Tetsu Shiota of Anime Jungle in Los Angeles, who was able to track down the director for me. Shizuo Nakajima was completely incredulous that an American had been searching for 13 years to find out more about his momentous production. The love and devotion, not to mention all the hard work, that Mr. Nakajima put into this film needs to be recognized as important. I sincerely appreciate his cooperation in documenting his production. 🙏

*Mark Jaramillo is a lifelong fan of monster movies and cryptozoology with a special love for Japanese Science Fiction Cinema and Television. His writings and research can be found at [www.insearchofmonsters.com](http://www.insearchofmonsters.com).*



# KAMEN RIDER V3 LIVES!

*The Legendary Spirit of  
Hiroshi Miyauchi Rides On!*

by Edward L. Holland

heroes, changing the game forever with his dynamic debut into the hallowed *tokusatsu* hall of fame—and became not only one of the best-loved actors, but one of the greatest personalities in the history of the genre.

His trajectory to super stardom, however, was a bombastic start on the wrong foot. According to legend, Miyauchi was called during his winter holiday to do an interview with Kamen Rider producers, Tohru Hirayama (JOHNNY SOKKO) and Seiji Abe (DYNAMAN) and was not thrilled about it all. He did not know much about the part and burst into the office by kicking the door in, making a loud and lasting impression on the producers in the process. They rode him for it later, but this bold insolence resulted in nabbing the legendary lead.

KAMEN RIDER V3 was born from the ingenious inkpot of Shotaro Ishinomori (CYBORG 009), and its serialized characters, monsters, and action in particular really put the program on the international map, building upon its already two-year cult following overseas. This single show became a hit not only in Japan, but eventually in Hong Kong and Hawaii, leading to appearances by Miyauchi on the island state not once, but several

During the apex of Japan's second Monster Boom, television viewers were completely unprepared for the powder-keg showmanship of Toei Studios' Hiroshi Miyauchi in KAMEN RIDER V3, the "Elvis" of the original KAMEN RIDER franchise! Featured every Saturday night starting in 1973 for 52 rock-solid

weeks, this iconic hero transformed into something greater than expected by Shotaro Ishinomori, its creator and *manga sensei*, and even the production crew themselves.

Miyauchi, with his signature good looks and insistence on risking his life in dangerous stunts, defined his character as the model spirit of Kamen Rider and *henshin*







**ABOVE: Destron's first monstrous cybernetic mutant, Scissors Jaguar! BELOW LEFT: Sinister Destron Commandant Doktor G!**



times over the years—most recently the 2012 Shirokiya Department Store 350th anniversary event alongside fellow legend Daisuke Ban (KIKAIDA).

KAME RIDER V3 introduces Shiro Kazami, a biochemistry college grad student, whose simple desires to continue riding motorcycles and live a peaceful life hits rock bottom with the senseless murders of his father, mother, and sister at the vicious blades of Scissors-Jaguar from Destron, an evil society which rose from the fiery ashes of the terrorist organizations Shocker and Gel Shocker from KAMEN RIDER (1971-1973). Where Riders No. 1 (Hiroshi Fujioka) and No. 2 (Takeshi Sasaki) succeeded in introducing the myths for the upstart hero show, KAMEN RIDER V3 dynamite-blasted the airwaves into hyper-drive, expanding the canvas with vivid cinematography, twisted monsters, pop art sets, updated designs, wild fight choreography, tons of new scenic locations, and 4-5 times more pyrotechnics than any show during its time (at the continual request of Miyauchi).

Miyauchi learned his craft under Sonny "Shinichi" Chiba (KILL BILL VOL. 1), and thus demanded to do his own hair-

raising stunts: transforming on moving motorcycles, hanging from cable cars 100 meters in the air, jumping off of vehicles, dangling on ocean embankments, and much more. Miyauchi told *Monster Attack Team*, "All the movies I was in were for Toei as their 12th New Faces actor. Sonny Chiba was part of the 6th New Faces auditions held every year to discover new actors, and is known as the god of action stars. So I followed Chiba around, and thought about how cool I could be by running straight through explosions towards the camera, or by looking towards the side of the camera lens—I stole that technique from him. But action is not just hitting and fighting. You also have to be cool when you are running alone. While we were co-starring in KEY HUNTER [Miyauchi's first big series], I stole a lot of [Chiba's] action techniques." For V3, you name it and he did it—with extra flair receiving permanent scars for his bravery, which he refers to as medals of achievement.

Miyauchi could have walked away from V3 with his stellar contribution to the hero genre complete, but instead rode further on down the trail to portray Blue Ranger in the first *Sentai* Series SECRET TASK

FORCE: GORANGER (1975), then as Ken Hayakawa in VIGILANTE ZUBAT (1977), Shokichi Banha/Big-1 in JAKQ: BLITZKRIEG SQUAD (1977), cameos in the Japanese SPIDER-MAN (1978), SPACE SHERIFF GAVAN (1982), and supporting roles in SPECIAL RESCUE POLICE: WINSPECTOR (1990), SUPER RESCUE: SOLBRAIN (1991), SPECIAL RESCUE: EXCEEDRAFT (1992), and SUPEROHRANGER (1995).

He also reprised his role as Banha/Big-1 in GAORANGER VS. SUPER TASK FORCES (2001); and in KAMEN RIDER: THE NEXT (2007), he revived the role of Kamen Rider mentor Tobei "Pops" Tachibana made immortal by the late Akiji Kobayashi (best known for playing Captain Muramatsu in ULTRAMAN). He also performed the voice of SkekSil, the Skeksis Chamberlain, in the Japanese version of THE DARK CRYSTAL (1982), and appeared as Kazuo Fuyuki in Jun Fukuda's THE WAR IN SPACE (1977).

In KAMEN RIDER V3, Miyauchi played Shiro Kazami, a third-degree black belt determined to karate chop all competition in his path astride the explosive Hurricane, a double-typhoon powered motorcycle, growling at 600 kilometers per hour. And Miyauchi delivered each week, holding his ground with suspenseful, spy-themed storylines. In the first episode, Shiro Kazami sacrifices his life trying to save Rider No. 1 and Rider No. 2, who return the favor by rejuvenating him into a masked, insect-like cybernetic warrior set to save Japan from the evil ways of Destron and its infernal army of mutants, led by the omnipotent "Great Leader." Kamen Rider V3 proves so strong that the malcontent eventually puts together a genocidal succession of Commandants—Doktor G, Baron Tusk, Archbishop Wing, and Marshall Armor—to try and defeat our hero. And in Episode 28, "The Five Officers' All-Out Attack!," the former leaders of Shocker and Gel Shocker are brought together under Destron's Doktor G in a mission to physically split the Japanese archipelago (!!). Can V3 defeat them all?

The field veterans of the KAMEN RIDER V3 production team really shifted gears for this follow up to the long-running KAMEN RIDER, working harder and pushing the envelope with new designs, but they weren't necessarily concerned with the safety of their actors. Regardless, the crew, stuntmen, and actors created a rich



**Blowfish-Apache gets the drop on Shiro Kazami!**

superhero soup, sometimes dangerously stretching the limitations of their budget. If it were not for the incredible popularity and high ratings of V3 and the "26 Secrets" of his success, there never would have been the succession of fellow cybernetic superheroes, including V3's sidekick, Rideman, played

by the late Akira Yamaguchi.

KAMEN RIDER V3 was further complimented by the electrifying music score of Shunsuke Kikuchi, who was responsible for numerous action, science fiction, superhero, and anime background music over the years—from Camera to



Goke—and defined the “Kamen Rider Sound” for the ’70s and ’80s. There were also the insane stunts by the *Ono Ken-yukai*, the pretty love interest Hizuru Ono as Junko Tama, and the well-integrated Kamen Rider Scouts—a supporting cast of children for young viewers to identify with. The V3 formula not only worked beyond all expectations, but it kept the other networks green with envy, and it is the character that Miyauchi is best known for during his heyday years at Toei (only his own role as Ken Hayakawa in ZUBAT comes close to his V3 popularity).

As his stardom vehicle grew, so did the onslaught of merchandise and tie-ins, making Kamen Rider a brand to be reckoned with, challenging the likes of Ultraman and Godzilla, and then-current anime titles like Go Nagai’s MAZINGER Z. Since Miyauchi’s signature role the freight train success of Kamen Rider has virtually been unstoppable for 42 years running. The entire V3 DVD series is conveniently available in North America from Generation Kikaida in one boxset (with English Subtitles), which is far more affordably priced than the imported Japanese versions, and packed with a

truckload of special feature bonuses, factoids, and other extras unavailable elsewhere.

During a visit to Southern California in 2011, master monster-maker Shinichi Wakasa (responsible for many of the latter day Godzilla suits) reflected on the virtues of KAMEN RIDER V3, including the scope of excellent *kaijin* (mutant) designs by Akira Takahashi and Equis Productions. He proudly bragged about having uploaded all 52 episodes from the US box set, exclaiming, “I really love V3!” He and other diehards, from Tokyo to Honolulu to San Francisco and New York City, are joining the V3 Club, each discovering the unmatched virtues in comparison to any other series of its kind.

KAMEN RIDER V3 still ranks as one of the best superhero programs ever made, and continues to be an enjoyable experience with each and every viewing, even in this digital effects age. In contrast to its visual trappings, KAMEN RIDER V3 is played straight and is somewhat dark and extremely violent, with very little comic relief (unlike today’s Kamen Rider productions) and a maximum emphasis on fast-paced narratives and break-neck action.

It comes as no surprise that Miyauchi is very serious when it comes to talking about his motivation in playing a superhero, and he is thankful that his works continue to spread beyond his homeland. He has stated several times in the past that “TV superheroes are educational textbooks,” and has spoken about teaching children from the heart as to the meaning of justice through his characters — even in the pages of his 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary autobiography, *HERO’S ESSENCE* (Fubataha, 1999).

Even though Kazuki Kato (KAMEN RIDER KABUTO) took over the mantle of Shiro Kazami for the updated KAMEN RIDER: THE NEXT, Miyauchi is still remembered and beloved as the one and only Kamen Rider V3—and the best Japanese superhero role model, bar none.

Viva Miyauchi! 🍌

*Edward L. Holland is the Captain of Monster Attack Team, the new publication from the publishers of Famous Monsters, focusing on the world of Japanese Superheroes, Monsters, and Pop Culture.*



**OPPOSITE:** V3’s amazing nuclear-powered superbike, The Hurricane! **ABOVE:** Knife-Armadillo delivers a deadly knee blow!

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– Pete Hammond, *MOVELINE*



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## LETTER TO AN

# Angel

BY FORRY ACKERMAN

*Many years prior to becoming FM's founding editor, Forrest J Ackerman wrote a touching story about a young boy struggling with the death of his hero: Lon Chaney Sr. Much has been made of Forry's religious beliefs (or lack thereof), but none of that takes away from this story, a semi-autobiographical story created to help a young man cope with the pain of loss that death brings. The following is a rare treat; Forry's original story printed in its entirety for all of you to enjoy.*

The day Lon Chaney died it came to Mrs. Roberta O'Toole like a banshee that this actor's death was to influence her life in some fateful fashion. Lon Chaney was not merely a movie star, but like a living member of her family. He was Timmy O'Toole's idol, just as young Tim was the shamrock of his Mother's eye.

All the time she was undressing Timmy for bed, worry-thoughts niggled and nagged in Mother's mind. How should she break the bad news to him? He was sure to be shocked. It was worse than the Christmas when parents finally nerve themselves to tell their youngsters that there is no Santa Claus.

Would her Mother's instinct tell her the right moment? Or could she skillfully maneuver it some way? It would be cruel to leave him to learn about it at school the next day from one of the members of his Monster Club.

The solution offered itself quite naturally. Timmy, pajama fly neatly buttoned up over his plump little bottom, knelt by his pillow and said his good night prayers. After the family names and the President, he concluded, "And God bless Douglas Fairbanks, and Mary Pickford, and most of all God bless Lon Chaney." Then he turned and kissed his Mommy and clambered into bed.

"Tell me a ghost story," he said. "With Lon Chaney in it."

Mother hesitated.

"Timmy—" she began. Her voice held a strange sound in it, moist and mincey, like the time his little puppy, Clover King, had been run over. Sensing some tragedy about to enter his life, Timmy hugged his cloth-and-stuffings replacement for Clover.

"Timmy—Mommy has something to tell

you. About Mr. Chaney. You know, people don't live forever. Especially people who work very hard. And Mr. Chaney—he died today. He—"

She said no more but helplessly regarded in mute horror what she had done to her little son. With all the love and best intentions in the world, she had not been able to protect him from this moment. His china-blue eyes had gone saucerwide. His naturally pale face had visibly whitened. Unconsciously, he clutched Clover around his muzzle. His nose wrinkled, his face squeezed up, and his breath escaped irregularly, as though he had the start of a sniffling cold.

"Lon Chaney... died? He died?" Disbelief, soul-deep, clogged Timmy's throat.

"Yes, dear. In the newspaper it said..."

"Show me!" His voice held a tone of Doubting Thomas, insisting to touch the wound in the side of his risen Master.

Mother moved into the front room, grateful for a momentary escape from her grim ordeal. "Jerome, have you got the paper handy?"

Father handed the paper to Mother. "How's he taking it?"

"Hard—worse than we thought."

Mother returned to the bedroom. Timmy sat up straight in bed, like a martyr about to lose his eyesight. "Show me!" he said. "Show me where it says!"

Mother pointed to the headlines. The type was very large. **WORLD MOURNS CHANEY**. There was a montage covering half the front page: Chaney as Quasimodo, as **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA**, as the slant-eyed Oriental **MR. WU**, as the Paggiacci of **HE WHO GETS SLAPPED**, as the contorted cripple of **THE MIRACLE MAN**. August 26<sup>th</sup>, 1930, and Lon Chaney,

the master of make-up, "the man of a thousand faces", was dead of cancer in a Hollywood hospital.

Timmy held the paper in his hands a long, long time. It trembled slightly. Mother said nothing. She saw tears forming in his eyes. She sat helplessly by, not knowing what to say in this crisis, what gesture of comfort or understanding to offer.

Then she saw something else forming in Timmy's eyes: resolution. He threw off the bed covers.

"Timmy! Whatever are you doing?"

"I have to get dressed, Mom."

"Dressed? At this time of night? It's nearly quarter of nine, dear. Whatever for?"

"Something."

"Well—" Mother hesitated. An appeal to authority: "I don't know what your Daddy will say. Perhaps I'd better go ask him."

Mother left the room in indecision. Timmy was busy shrugging back into his coversalls.

Mother went directly to Father. Father put down his pipe. "Timmy is acting funny," she said.

"In what way?"

"He's getting dressed. I can't think whatever for."

"Dressed? Let's see."

Mother trailed Father to Timmy's room.

Timmy was sitting at his writing desk. He had torn a page from his Big Five notebook. He was laboriously printing something, nervously licking the pencil lead from time to time. When he was finished, he volunteered to show what he had written to Mother and Father.

*Dear Lon Chaney. Don't be lonely tonight. I am praying for you, and missing you. I will never forget you. Please answer*



this if you can, Your best Fan, Timothy O'Toole, 5327 Citrus Avenue, Los Angeles, California.

"Now I need an envelope. And a stamp. An airmail stamp."

Wordlessly, with a look of incomprehension to Father, Mother fetched Timmy his envelope and stamp. Timmy folded the note neatly, twice, inserted it into the envelope, licked the flap, sealed it, and printed on the cover: LON CHANEY, HEAVEN. Then he affixed the big red-and-blue five-center.

Again he found use for his parents. "Dad, have you a flashlight?"

"Why, what for, son?"

"I want to find my kite."

"At this time of night?" asked Mrs. O'Toole.

"Please—it's very important, Mother."

"What do you want with your kite tonight, Timmy?"

"I need to send this message, Dad."

"To Lon Chaney? With your kite?"

"Yes."

Mother turned away to stifle a sob.

"Don't you think it's a little late, son?"

"Gosh, it's already after 9 o'clock. Dad, what time do angels go to bed?"

"Why—I really don't know."

"I guess grown angels stay up pretty late," suggested Mother.

"Then I have to go."

Mother went to the closet and brought back Timmy's warm green pullover. "I want you to put this on if you're going out into the chilly night air," she said. Gently she pulled the sweater over Timmy's head, and down over his little humped back.

In the dark garage Daddy chased eerie shadows away with the pale beam from the Ten Cent Store searchlight. The amber ray fell on Timmy's homemade goblin mask with its hollow cucumber nose protruding like a tapir's snout and its mass of excelsior hair dyed blood red with Rit. The light touched his penny-a-day lending library of a baker's dozen of GHOST STORIES magazine with their spooky covers.

Outside, a chorus of crickets stridulated their night-song: *crikadee... crikadee... crikadee...*

Illuminated in turn were Timmy's "genuine" aborigine boomerang, procured from the catalog of the mailorder novelty house in Kansas; his precious personally scissored and pasted scrapbook of Lon Chaney pictures; the gunpowdery smelling shells of burned-out fireworks, still saved from the Fourth as fine mementoes of an exhilarating evening of pyrotechnics; and, at last, hung up on a ten-penny nail, his dusty kite. The bad tear in it would need repair before it could take to the sky again. Mother's brown stickum paper could take care of that.

A big Daddy Longlegs, his nocturnal affairs disturbed by this unusual activity in his domain and sensing danger, hastily began to descend from the web he had industriously spun over the kite.

*Don't step on it—it may be Lon Chaney!*

If every kid in the country took the publicists as seriously as Timmy, no flack artist need ever worry about his promotion being successful. Yes, Timmy was convinced, a man who could make his legs disappear, who could grow a hump on his back and take it off again (that was a trick Timmy hoped to accomplish when he grew up), who could look like he was blind, who could throw real sharp knives with his toes and hit the bull's eye, who could slide down a tight-rope on his head—who was to deny that such a god-like man might not also make himself look like a gorilla or a scarecrow... or even a spider?

Timmy, his own shadow wavering like some supernatural spectre, reached with a finger and cautiously picked Mr. Longlegs' Web-strand out of the air. Gently he let the old grandfather down onto the oily gravel, watched him scuttle away to safety behind an empty orange crate. Then Daddy lifted down the Hi-Flyer.

They took the kit into the house. Mother insisted on taking it back to the back porch and dusting it off. Its rent was patched. Then Timmy took a safety pin and attached his envelope to the tattered tail of the kite—a couple of Father's Day ties that had seen better days.

Son and Father set out hand in hand for the ball park. Mother was agitated but Dad had nodded his hrow-furrowed, quick "don't interfere" nod, so she hid her counsel and contented herself with calling after them. "Try not to be too long, Daddy. Timmy isn't used to the night air and it's long past his bed time."

"Alright, dear."

Teachers assigned for year in rural schools

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# LON CHANEY, MYSTERY MAN OF SCREEN, DIES

## CHICAGO AIR DERBY CROWDS AWAIT LINDBERGH'S ARRIVAL

### COLONEL FAILS NATION'S BANKERS PREPARE TO AID FARMERS RALLYING WHEN

#### HEMORRHAGE STRIKES

##### TO ANNOUNCE PLAYS

###### NOVA'S DURY

###### Recapture Dictator

###### Flowers' From Peggy To Schultz

###### Hamilton Took 1st Place

###### Two Firms Close



Recapture Dictator



Flowers' From Peggy To Schultz

PRINTED AT THE JOURNAL PRESS, HAMILTON, N.Y.

"And don't let him overexert himself. The doc—"

It was hard work to get the kite into the air; there was very little breeze stirring that night. Dad stood on tiptoes and held the kite as high as he could but every time Timmy would run off with it, it would abruptly nosedive to the ground, threatening to crack its wooden skeleton.

"Hadden't you better let me try, son?" Dad offered after Timmy had made half a dozen unsuccessful trial runs; but, no, Timmy had to launch it himself. It was his message and he was responsible for getting it delivered.

At last a vagrant breeze caught the kite, and the ball of string unwound in Timmy's hands as the Hi-Flyer took to its medium and chased toward the clouds. Finally the string came to its end, and only the stick was left.

The kite bobbed about in the vault above like a high flying phantom, and Daddy thought he saw something flutter from its tail but he couldn't be sure. Little Timmy was panting from exertion, the freckled forehead of his flushed face spattered with perspiration. Mother wouldn't approve; in fact, Daddy wasn't too pleased with the situation himself. After about half an hour of the kite flying, Jerome O'Toole tentatively suggested, "Don't you think it's about time to reel it in now, son?"

"Just 10 minutes more," Timmy said. "The message has a long way to go."

Moonlight made a white shield of the kite.

Minutes passed in silence, until: "He was a wonderful man," Timmy said. "He could do anything. I'll bet not even Dunninger or Thurston or Houdini ever could do Lon Chaney's tricks—like making a hump disappear."

"Yes," said Jerome O'Toole, avoiding to look at his son's forever-crooked back, "he was a great man."

When they reeled the kite in a few minutes later, the message was gone. On the way home they passed Dorschkind's Drugstore, which was still open, and Dad said, "How about a double-decker cornucopia?" But Timmy replied, "I'm not very hungry tonight."

Mother tucked an exhausted boy into bed a second time that night. "Do you think he got my message, Mama?" Earnest eyes looked searchingly to Mama for confirmation. Mama, her own eyes shiny bright with unshed moisture, bent and kissed her son on his sweet little mouth. "I'm sure of it, darling. Now, go to sleep—and pleasant dreams."

"Goodnight, Mommy. And God bless Lon Chaney."

Long after Timmy had been taken by the Sandman, Mother sat by his bedside and peered inwardly at the cinema of her own mind. She saw again his 7th birthday, when LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT had been

playing at the neighborhood theater and he had preferred treating all his friends to the show to having a party at home with games and prizes and all the trimmings. She had given him a dollar bill and he had proudly stepped up to the box-office window and pushed it through the wicket to the cashier. "Ten tickets, please!" Then he ushered his little pals and girlfriends into the lobby, down the aisle single file, as near to the front as he could possibly get. It gave Mother a headache to sit that close, but she endured. She shuddered at the memory of the bone-white face Chaney effected as the London monster, with his eyes popping like olive pits out of hard-boiled eggs, and the scary teeth that sent shivers up her spine in retrospect. The man always frightened her, but Timmy couldn't get enough of him. Cora and Fifi, the next-door twins, however, were paralyzed with fear, and Mrs. O'Toole had to take them home before many reels had unwound.

She would never cease to feel jittery at the memory of that living death's-head that Chaney had somehow created in THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA. She had actually shrieked right out loud in the theater and buried her head, embarrassed, on Father's chest when Mary Philbin slipped the mask off Chaney as he sat playing the organ. His outraged visage had been horror incarnate: bulging, bloodshot eyes fatigued with violet semicircles beneath them; the grotesquely exaggerated mounds of the cheekbones; the hooked-up, flaring, porcine nostrils; the rotted, jagged teeth, like the rim of an enameled tin can top opened with a ragged knife; the scraggly strands of dead gray hair hanging like soggy serpentine from the incredible dome head... But little Tim had screamed in pure delight and clapped his hands—and insisted on returning for the Saturday matinee. He was there Sunday too, sitting through two complete showings, fortified only by a bag of jujubes and an Abazaba. That Timmy! That precious little tyke!

Mother shook herself from reminiscing. She patted Timmy's tousled head, pressed a kiss to his soft young cheek, then went to the adjoining room and bed.

Timmy had a sore throat and running nose the next morning, which was a drizzly day anyway, so Mother decided to keep him home from school. He sat impatiently looking out the front window at the porch, waiting for the mailman. When he saw the



rubber raincoated figure coming up the street, letter bag under arms, he ran and stood anxiously waiting by the door.

"Have you anything for me, Mr. Post-Toastie Man?" Timmy inquired expectantly.

"Why, no, 'fraid I haven't, young fella. Just for your Pop. How come you aren't in school?"

"Timmy has a cold coming on, I'm afraid," said Mother, arriving at the door to receive the mail. Pressing Timmy to her side she managed to suggest, "Maybe there'll be a letter for you tomorrow, dear."

"Who's he expecting to hear from? Little early for Christmas," said the Post-Toastie Man as he departed.

"An angel!" Timmy called after him.

The carrier halted momentarily in his tracks, looked back, chuckled, then continued along his route.

Timmy passed the rest of the day thumbing through his scrapbook for the thousandth time. Here was a bald Lon Chaney, confined to a wheelchair, in WEST OF ZANZIBAR (where the delicious Abazabas with their peanut butter centers came from)—yet here he had regained use of his legs and, in fact, was throwing knives with his feet!

This picture always made Timmy laugh: Lon made up like a woman! Imagine, a kind white-haired old lady, old enough to be his own Gra' Maureen! That was a real funny one—Lon Chaney pretending like he was a lady. That was about the only thing Timmy wouldn't want to be.

Now look at those fingernails, so long they looked like those icily things they called skelacties or something. Their length meant he was a very rich Mandarin and didn't have to work, so he could let his fingernails grow. Sometimes, and for the same reason, Timmy wished he were a Mandarin.

But most of all Timmy wished he knew Lon Chaney's secrets; how, from a hunchback just like Tim, Lon could turn himself from Quasimodo into a wonderful clown with a back as straight as a wooden school ruler.

That night Mother and Dad had a serious talk about their Timmy lad. Mr. O'Toole was of the opinion the boy would forget about his tragic loss and the letter in a couple of days and everything would return to normal. Mother wasn't so optimistic. "What would you think of writing an answer to Timmy?" Mother put forward the suggestion timidly.

"What! Me? Pretend to be Lon Chaney?"

"You could just say 'Thank you for your kind wishes', or something like that," Mother persisted.

During the night Timmy developed pneumonia. He tossed and turned and it hurt Mother and Dad to the heart to watch their son roll restlessly back and forth on his curved back.

In the morning the doctor thought Timmy might have to go to the hospital. The youngster insisted he would have to stay home and wait for the mail. Lon Chaney might want to hear from him again. Now that he was dead, he might even reveal his secrets—at least to his greatest admirer.

Timmy's spirits declined visibly when the mail came that day and there was no letter for him. Mother called Dad home from work at noon time and they had a hurried conference, as a result of which Dad agreed that he would write a letter from Lon Chaney that evening. That it was delivered the next day was too much for the brokenhearted O'Toole to bear, because Timmy died in his sleep shortly before midnight.

The mightiest and most majestic of all clocks, which tolls the time in Heaven, has a bell of supernal perfection fashioned of purest gold with tongue of solid silver. As it pealed forth the hour of 12 throughout the Kingdom, Timmy O'Toole approached the Pearly Gates. He did not even notice


as St. Peter swung them wide for him: his gaze was intent on the angels, and he was seeking one in particular as the harps played promises of Paradise and the Heavenly Choir sang "Hallelujah!" to welcome this big-hearted little soul into the Father's Mansion.

Then Timmy's heart leapt right into his throat. Timmy recognized HIM. His beloved idol sat on a magnificent throne and he wore the most impressive make-up of all. He was giant tall; and a tremendous beard, bright as the sun at the equator, flowed from his infinitely kind face to the floor of polished ivory. And an astonishing circle of shimmering light shone over his head—a thrilling effect that Timmy had never seen in any movie.

"Come here, my boy," he bade him, and he spoke with the resonant volume of the mighty organ that always accompanied his pictures.

"Lon Chaney!" Timmy cried with a cry of ineffable joy and sprang forward and leaped into his lap.

And the Good Lord's eyes were bright with understanding as He laid His arm 'round Timmy's shoulders. And Timmy's back miraculously straightened and his hated hump disappeared as God enfolded him, but Timmy did not even notice he was free of his deformity.

His face was turned upward in adoration. "Lon Chaney!" he breathed. And God smiled. 



**FORRY AND FRIENDS** (top row from left): Legendary FM cover artist Basil Gogos, Monster Maker Rick Baker, collector/monster historian extraordinaire Bob Burns, close Forry friend and Film Producer Paul Davids; (bottom row from left): KING KONG (2005) director Peter Jackson, Uncle Forry.

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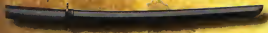
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*I see horror as part of legitimate film. I don't see it as an independent genre that has nothing to do with the rest of cinema.*

—Guillermo del Toro



## NEXT ISSUE:

Viva La Lucha! In the history of cinema, no man has battled more classic monsters than El Santo, the masked luchador. This Halloween, Famous Monsters travels to Mexico to unlock the myth and mysteries behind some of film's greatest monster hunters and their movies: El Santo, Mil Mascaras, Blue Demon, Tinieblas, and more. . . We'll also have a chat with Monster Kid, artist, and WWE legend Jerry "The King" Lawler, and celebrate 80 years of Universal's THE INVISIBLE MAN. We'll look at Alfonso Cuarón's new space odyssey—GRAVITY—as well as the cinematography of Sci-Fi, the origins of Freddy's infamous glove, 45 years of Romero's NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD, and so much more! Featuring "El Santo giving Wolfie the business" cover by Terry Wolfinger!

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